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ABSTRACT

In this collection of articles designed for the elementary school teacher there are capsule portraits of the 6-, 7-, 8-, 9-, and 10-year-old and an outline of a full program for a good school day. Also included are discussions on children's thinking and how it can be encouraged, creativity, the stages of the creative process and ways creativity can be fostered. Other articles focus on learning centers, open education, discipline, working with teaching aides, and the relationship between parents and school. A selected bibliography lists resources for teachers interested in reading about the topics in greater depth. (MS)

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Primary School Potpourri

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Foreword

To ascertain the trends of our times, we have but to walk down the aisles of a supermarket. Each advertising box calls out to us in glaring letters, "New, improved!" "Ultra modern!" "Power plus!" Such tantalizing description is designed to lure the consumers; sometimes in doing so it confuses them. The process of educational change in the past decade seems to have taken a similar trend.

Particularly in the past few years, we have seen the elementary school given new titles, new programs, even new structural designs. New words and phrases have been coined, seemingly overnight—"the open school," "multi-learning" packages, "individualized learning centers," "team teaching," "modular scheduling packets"—to name a few. During the late '50s and '60s the federal government appeared to have rediscovered the young child. New programs, new methods were outlined and prescribed for the issuance of federal monies. At the same time, publishing houses and other big businesses were alerted to the tremendous profit-potential in producing multifaceted educational materials.

Through all of this stir, the elementary teacher has been a stabilizing factor attempting to sift the grain from the chaff, seeking to meet the individual needs of children and provide pathways for their budding creative interests. And amidst the changing tides of innovation, the tensions of a segmented society, and the quest for true excellence in teaching, the Association for Childhood Education International has continued to be a bulwark. ACEI has sought to develop positions on significant educational issues, to encourage the curious minds of innovative educators, and at the same time to hold fast to policies and practices worthy of retention.

The *Primary School Potpourri* continues this tradition. It revises and updates the popular *Primary School Portfolio* (last published in 1967). First, Gladys Gardner Jenkins provides a capsule view of patterns of child growth and development, knowledge of which is every teacher's basic nonnegotiable tool. Audrianna Allen and Marcus Ballenger then suggest ways to free children's thinking in an ever-expanding universe. Mary Harbage reminds us that all children have the right to a "Good School Day"—whether laughing shrilly over a favorite poem, enjoying the good feeling of finger paint oozing through small fingers or being thrilled by a new science discovery. Rose Mukerji next clearly outlines stages of the creative process that can enliven any educational setting. Bob Hollenbeck and Michael Radis give many useful leads to constructive use of "Learning Centers." And Dorothy Anker describes promising educational concepts that have come together under the rubric of "The Open Classroom."

More practical helps are provided by Joanne Bernstein, with frequently requested suggestions for "Approaches to Discipline." Important counsel about cooperative approaches to teaching follow, with ideas from Dorothy Gross and Nancy Balaban on "Working with Aides" and from Vito Perrone on "Parents and Schools." Finally Barbara Goodwin with the assistance of Violetta Patrick, resource librarian, provides an excellent bibliography for teachers who wish to pursue in greater depth some of this publication's many ideas.

For children to live, grow and mature in a world that is changing faster each year than in some previous decades, they must be helped to develop ways of coping, of achieving success, and of developing lasting, fulfilling and equitable human relationships. Toward these purposes, this publication is presented. May you, the classroom teacher, be helped hereby to understand better the tremendous challenges and growing urgency for excellence in programs for today's children.

Marcus Ballenger, *Coordinator*, Undergraduate Programs for Elementary and Secondary Education, Wichita State University, Ks. Member-at-Large, Executive Board of the Association for Childhood Education International (1973–76)

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2 The Sixes, Sevens, Eights, Nines and Tens

Gladys Gardner Jenkins*

The one generalization that can be made about sixes, sevens, eights and nines is that they are all different, each one being a distinct individual. Each progresses at his or her own rate, moving sometimes slowly, sometimes swiftly from one stage to another. But there are a number of common characteristics many children within an age group share. On these we base our generalizations, from these we draw "reasonable expectations."

On Being Six Years Old

The six-year-old is in a stage of continuous growth and change—organs, framework and muscles. At this time, eyes are not yet mature in either size or shape, and their relatively shallow depth probably accounts for a tendency toward faresightedness. Sometime between eight and ten the child's eyes attain adult size and shape. Eye and hand preference are well established by six, but coordination of eye and hand movements are not yet smooth. Muscular development is also uneven; in general, large muscles are more advanced than the small ones. Precise movements may require considerable effort and strain.

Six-year-olds are active. They rush about in their play, jump up from the table at mealtimes, wriggle in their seats at school, and gesture freely as they talk. Their whole bodies seem to be involved in everything they do. They may try to sit still, but they are not able to do so for long periods because it is difficult for them to control their movements. It is clearly unwise to put unnecessary strain on these youngsters by expecting them to sit still for more than a short period of time. They are better "beginners" than "finishers" unless deeply interested; then they amaze teachers and parents by the length and depth of involvements.

They absorb ideas better when discussions and explanations are accompanied by many chances to handle all kinds of materials and opportunities to move about in the classroom. Six-year-olds enjoy using their hands, but their relatively short periods of interest in some areas make it hard to carry an activity through to a conclusion. Since the small muscles of the arms and hands are not completely developed, it is difficult for many children to write or cut well or to do handwork that involves skill, control or concentrated effort.

Eagerness to learn is one of the most endearing traits of six-year-olds. Theirs is the age of *why*. How the questions of these children are answered and their curiosity stimulated and encouraged partly determines their subsequent attitudes toward learning.

Decisions and choices are hard for these children to make. In fact, it is wise not to expect too many decisions from them. This does not mean that programs for this grade

*Adapted from THESE ARE YOUR CHILDREN: Fourth Edition by Gladys Gardner Jenkins and Helen S. Shacter. Copyright © 1975, 1966 by Scott, Foresman and Company. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

should be rigid. On the contrary, much freedom and adaptability within the program are needed even while broad limits and sequences are clearly marked.

Primarily the sixth year is one of transition. The child is not a more integrated, better adjusted five-year-old; but may frequently be less well balanced, less robust, less decisive, and often less cooperative than a year earlier. The six-year-old wants to grow up, but at the same time feels small and dependent upon the supporting affection of adults. The new experiences of the elementary school may seem both exciting and overwhelming. There is a thrust forward into the world of children and at the same time a need for some continuing dependence upon trusted grown-ups. Rigid discipline or a severe atmosphere at home or school may inhibit independence rather than foster it. The six-year-old wilts under disapproval and may become easily discouraged. Explosiveness and changeability are normal at this age and should be expected within reasonable degree (furious one minute, often forgetting anger the next). Grudges are rarely held. Six-year-olds plunge into activity, get tired almost to exhaustion without having the wisdom to stop their active boisterous play. There is a need to protect them from themselves. Affection, warmth, friendliness and a sense of humor can help the adult live happily with six-year-olds. These children need praise, encouragement, understanding, and friendly guidance.

Emphasis upon academic achievement can destroy a first-grader's confidence. Grades or marks should not be emphasized but each child should be helped to read, write and do numbers when mastery becomes possible. Not all first-graders will be ready for these experiences at the same time. Some may be far ahead of others and should be met at their advanced level if boredom and restlessness are to be avoided, while others will not be ready until later. By building on the child's point of readiness, each youngster will pass more smoothly and efficiently from the primary into the middle school without the discouraging effects of failure.

Adults are often impatient, expecting too much of six-year-olds. Success should be judged by direction of progress and attitude toward learning rather than by a particular achievement at a particular time. Steady growth is a sign of success. If we expect more of a six-year-old than the child is ready or able to give, tensions may develop that will slow the process of learning and affect the child's self-image and the relationship with the school situation.

On Being Seven Years Old

The seven-year-old's feelings and attitudes toward school and other people are maturing. This year experiences, interests and reactions for most of the children will be on new levels. The body is still changing. Legs continue to lengthen rapidly. The large muscles are still ahead of the small muscles in their development, but the child is gradually developing more precision in the use of the small muscles. A pencil can be held more efficiently, although it may still be grasped tightly. A child may still show some tension when writing or printing. Eye-hand coordination is steadily improving. The eyes of some of the children may not yet be ready to accommodate to any prolonged near focusing, and considerable eye-rubbing has been noticed among this age group.

The seven-year-old may tire easily, often showing fatigue during the afternoon school session, particularly if sleep has been inadequate. Rest periods can be provided in many ways, including a change of activity. However, a healthy seven-year-old is full of vitality and energy. Activity is likely to be balanced with periods of relatively quiet play. Youngsters this age enjoy quiet games, although most of them still feel the greater drive to rush around, climb, do stunts, and take part in active, physical play.

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The seven-year-old learns more easily if presented with concrete situations, and much can be taught through manipulation of materials. These children should be encouraged to use their hands to explore their environment, to make things, to help them to understand science problems. Seven-year-olds are still unable to handle much abstract thought.

These children stand up for their rights on the playground and sometimes will defend the rights of another child, especially where property is concerned. A certain amount of aggressiveness and the ability to hold one's own position are becoming necessary. Children need help in learning how to do this without becoming overly aggressive or harming other children.

Seven-year-olds are becoming sensitive to what other children think about them. Many children become anxious lest others may not like them. Boys and girls play together in group games, but interests are diverging, possibly due to cultural pressure. Best friends are usually but not necessarily of the same sex.

Although wanting to be independent, many seven-year-olds do not quite trust themselves. A child may turn to the teacher for confirmation that some action is all right. Yet with too much adult control there may be rebellion. These children seem to need reassurance, without which many of them may give up trying new things. Criticism is hard to take and may result in anger or crying. Adults need to be supportive while encouraging independence and spontaneity.

Seven-year-olds are increasingly sensitive to feelings and attitudes of others. They are gradually becoming more aware of their feelings about other people, and of the way other people feel about them. This is a good time for role playing and for learning how one's actions affect other people. Many of these children are beginning to be able to assume some responsibility for what they do or say. They are concerned about right and wrong, and are frequently rigid about the rules of a game, indignant if customary rules are broken. Criticism of playmates who are considered to have done wrong may be given with some vehemence. Tattling is a way of finding out about right and wrong.

A seven-year-old's eagerness to do things the right way makes him more amenable than he was at six to conforming to adult standards. Sensitive to failure, ridicule or sarcasm, there may be compliance with adults out of fear of the consequences. Adults should endeavor to avoid approaches that make these children too conforming. They should give the support and encouragement that help to develop self-confidence, self-reliance and creativity; otherwise some of these children may become too inhibited, unable to move freely toward independence.

On Being Eight Years Old

Eight-year-olds are on the dividing line between early childhood and the more mature middle years. They are no longer little children, nor are they as "settled down" and responsible as most of them soon will be. They resent being talked down to by adults, but are still dependent upon praise and encouragement and need to be helped to understand and fulfill their responsibilities. Eight is a year when children are eager for new experiences. Many of them seem ready to tackle anything and often show more enthusiasm than wisdom in what they may attempt. Eight-year-olds want to try things out, to see how they work, to know how they are made. A wise adult will guide and use this enthusiasm and channel curiosity and vital interests into meaningful learning experiences.

Eight-year-olds are developing steadily but slowly. Arms are lengthening, and hands are growing larger. Eyes are beginning to accommodate more readily both to near and far distances, so that eight-year-olds are now better able to handle all forms of school work

that require eye-hand coordination. Near-sightedness is often noticed during this year.

Since the large muscles are still developing, children need many opportunities for movement and active, outdoor play. At the same time the small muscles are much better developed, and the children are able to use them more effectively and for longer periods of time.

Most eight-year-olds want a "best friend." There may be many quarrels and arguments among friends, but a sense of loyalty is developing. Children of this age also seem to enjoy having an "enemy." Sometimes two children or a group will single out another child as the foe, or as a scapegoat. Although the children can usually work out most of their interpersonal relationships without adult interference, it may be necessary for an adult to interfere if one child is being harmed by other children either physically or psychologically. Eight-year-olds may need help in learning to accept those who are different from themselves or those with whom they disagree. But because of their growing interest in people, the time is right to help them to develop a friendly interest in other children, particularly those outside of their immediate group.

Eight-year-olds still cannot take much criticism, although they are beginning to be more capable of some self-evaluation. They are also beginning to be better able to give and take criticism among their peers, providing it is within a basically friendly framework.

Movies, comics, radio and television have become a definite part of the life of the eight-year-old. They can learn much from television in particular, if wisely guided in their choice of programs. Some children will be stimulated by television to read for more of the story or for information and further facts. However, the child who is a poor reader may turn increasingly to television and other kinds of media such as comics. Many eight-year-olds read and enjoy books if their interest and delight in them has been encouraged and if they have mastered the skills of reading. Children who do not read well may already be rejecting the reading of books for pleasure. It is important to offer children of this age books that are full of adventure and humor within the range of their reading ability.

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Children of this age are also often avid collectors and hoarders. The collections may seem to be of little value to grown-ups, but they have meaning to the child and should not be discouraged. Indeed some of them may lead to a life-long interest.

Most children can now tell time and can relate it to the sequenced events of the day. Yet many do not seem ready to take complete responsibility for going to bed, getting up, or arriving at school on time. They have an understanding of days, months, years, and their relationship to one another. They have a growing interest in things that happened "long ago," but still some confusion about the exact time when past events occurred.

These youngsters are often argumentative and sometimes irksome. There is no longer complete acceptance of what an adult may say. Eight-year-olds are full of questions They are eager to find out about the world around them. They enjoy field trips. They are stimulating to be with. They may be beginning to be careless about their clothes, unwilling to help at home, sometimes noisy and bossy, but they are also usually loveable and friendly. This year can be a good one for adults and children, for eight-year-olds will respond well to wise and kindly adult leadership and guidance.

On Being Nine Years Old

Most nine-year-olds are fairly responsible and dependable. They understand explanations; they are interested in trying to do things well. They are beginning to have a real sense of what is right and wrong. Individual abilities are becoming clearly apparent and real interests are beginning to develop. The nine-year-old is an individual whose unique personality is becoming evident.

At nine the wide variations in development that will become increasingly evident at ten, eleven and twelve may be noticeable. In their interests most nine-year-olds are closer to those of ten- or eleven-year-olds than to seven- or eight-year-olds, whom they think of and sometimes refer to as "those children." This is especially true of fast-maturing girls, some of whom may be nearing preadolescence.

Physically, most nine-year-olds are experiencing the steady growth that has been apparent over the last three years. The lungs and the digestive and circulatory systems are still developing but are almost mature in function. The heart is not quite fully developed, and physical competition needs to be watched in order to avoid strain. Eyes are able to accommodate more comfortably to close work. Eye-hand coordination is greatly improved, and many youngsters are now quite skillful with their hands. However, individual differences in this area are becoming increasingly noticeable. Successes and difficulties are more evident.

The attention span has greatly increased but is still dependent upon interest and motivation. Forced or required attention over too long a period still may result in restlessness, a drop in interest, or even tension. Adults should avoid planning activities of too long duration. Nine-year-olds like to make plans of their own and can carry many of them out without adult direction. On the other hand, if interest flags, the project may be dropped without concern. A nine-year-old is a good beginner but does not always carry through. One interest may be supplanted by another, each entered into with initial enthusiasm.

Many nine-year-olds are becoming critical of the results of their work. Techniques and skills are becoming more important to them in both work and play. They want to know how to do things. However, adults can overdo the teaching of techniques and skills at this age. The adult who is over-insistent, too much of a perfectionist, can destroy a child's initial desire to master a skill and the pleasure in using it.

Competition needs to be kept within bounds not only for physical reasons, but also because the need to win can become too important. A nine-year-old may drive too hard to win, or a child may be hurt and discouraged by the jibes of others, because he is not able to win for his side. These children need to be helped to learn how to win and how to lose.

Many nine-year-olds are beginning to think for themselves and may no longer accept what parents and teachers say as being correct. They are beginning to find out that there are often many points of view. Some children will become critical and outspoken even with the adults of whom they are fond. But the nine-year-old is usually becoming reasonable; it is possible to talk things over as long as the adult is willing to listen to what the youngster has to say. There is also a greater capacity for recognizing and carrying responsibility. Nine-year-olds, however, are more responsive when they are included in choosing what they will be responsible for and in making plans than when they are told "this is what we are going to do."

Because nine-year-olds seem capable and independent in many ways, adults sometimes expect too much. These children still need appreciation and encouragement in their growing independence, but support when they still need to be dependent from time to time.

On Being Ten Years Old

Ten-year-olds are rounding out the childhood years and seem to be looking forward curiously and eagerly to being grown-up. Some of them are even beginning to wonder and talk about what they would like to do when they are grown-up. This is a good year for teaching and learning, particularly in the fields of science and social studies. Most ten-year-olds have a keen interest in what is going on not only in their immediate environment but in world affairs. They are interested in social problems in an elementary way and like to discuss them. They are becoming aware of differences among people, of social justice and injustice. They want to know why there are criminals and hungry people, why some people have a lot of money and others very little. Attitudes and prejudices are shaping up in wholesome or unwholesome ways.

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Feelings are being formed about authority and cooperating or not cooperating with it. Concepts of law and order are beginning to be developed. Ideas about democracy are forming. A whole new fund of information is being picked up from newspapers, magazines and television. If adults will take this growing concern seriously and meet these children at their level of thinking, their capacity to understand, these youngsters can grow astonishingly in their social concepts. Children at this critical age in their development can be helped to develop a constructive approach to the meaning of citizenship in our democracy.

For some children, this will be the dividing year between childhood and adolescence. Although most ten-year-olds are still physically children, others will be moving into the cycle of puberty. Many girls of this age are physically more mature than most of the boys. Some are already beginning to show signs of approaching menstruation. Occasionally a ten-year-old girl will already be menstruating. Some of the girls may be showing the spurts in height and weight that preface puberty. Some ten-year-olds may be showing some of the emotional tensions that sometimes accompany the physical changes of the cycle of puberty. For those children who are physically ahead of the others in their development this may be a difficult year.

Boys and girls, whether for cultural or maturational reasons, are beginning to separate more definitely in their interests and activities. Although they may enjoy doing many things together in school activities, in their spontaneous play the majority of them tend toward boy or girl groups. Considerable real or feigned antagonism may exist between these groups, with many complaints of teasing or interfering with each other's activities. Boys tend to form groups based on their activities, such as baseball or touch football. Any boy who can play is usually admitted to the group. Girls usually have "best friends" and are less likely to admit an outsider to their group. Best friends seem very important to most girls of this age, and the girl who does not belong to a little group may feel hurt and left out. This is the club-joining age, for both adult-directed, organized clubs and spontaneous ones. The latter quickly shift and change both in membership and purpose.

Ten-year-olds are physically active. Both girls and boys enjoy rushing around and being busy with many things. They may easily overload themselves with their many interests and activities. Adults also tend to overload youngsters of this age by enrolling them in too many worthwhile groups and out-of-school lessons. These children are still growing and often tire easily. They need opportunities for quiet activities as well as strenuous ones. They also need time to be on their own to follow their own interests and make their own plans.

There is a growing capability to take things in stride, but some ten-year-olds are overly conscientious and become worriers. Fear of failure is becoming a real concern even to children who do well in school. Ten-year-olds are all too aware of the consequences of failure. Pressures for achievement must be kept within realistic limits of what the individual child is able to achieve. If this is not done, many ten-year-olds begin to doubt themselves and to develop feelings of inferiority which may become permanent. Many children of this age, particularly boys, begin to dislike school because they feel inadequate, unable to meet the requirements for reading or carrying out the kinds of tasks the school requires. If sufficiently discouraged, some of the boys may truant from school, take part in vandalism or establish predelinquent patterns of behavior.

For most children, however, ten might be called a plateau year. It is a point of bringing together all that they have achieved and learned during the childhood years. It is a year of getting ready for the changes that will soon take place as they enter puberty. It is a good year in which to build for the future.

A Good School Day

By Mary Harbage

9

No set pattern or minute-by-minute plan can be set for any single classroom or for any one group two days in succession. Each classroom, each day, is unique. But there are certain common elements in day-by-day school living that go into the making of a good school day.

Each day in school should bring to every child an opportunity for laughter and merriment, wonder and curiosity, repose and reflection. There should be time for friendliness, independence, high adventure and vigorous activity. There will be responsibilities to assume, skills to master, problems to solve, and imagination to release. And most important, for each child, there should be a growing awareness of the worth of himself as a learner, a doer and a member of the school community.

Perhaps the groups in a school have a schedule or just a general framework for a day, i.e., times for occasional coming together for a story, some singing, or a group discussion. A flexible schedule or a framework made with large blocks of time becomes adjustable to the needs of the day. An alert teacher will know when a part of the day is going so well that an activity must not be interrupted.

Time To Talk

Another essential of every day is plenty of time for pupils to plan, discuss, consider, speculate, verify—even argue. There needs to be time for boys and girls in pairs or in small groups to talk to each other; the teacher; and, at less frequent times, the whole group. Worries, fears, concerns and difficulties need to be revealed early in the day and sometimes in private with the teacher. Joys and satisfactions can be more widely disseminated and enjoyed. One talking time should be reasonably early in the day, for exciting news will not keep too long—such events as a big brother coming home from overseas, a planned family ski trip, or an overnight hike.

There are a few "sh" classrooms still in existence, those wherein the voice most frequently heard is that of the teacher with the pupil's responses confined to monosyllables. Who is getting the practice in talking? The person who needs it least of all.

Planning and Evaluating

Each teacher has to keep several kinds of planning in progress at all times. An individual or a small group, less frequently the whole class, needs to review and perhaps reconsider plans as they move ahead. At the same time the teacher keeps in mind the long-term goals she has for the class. It is often good for the teacher to serve as a recorder and watch ideas sprout and grow; to see enthusiasm mount when boys and girls discuss seriously a plan of action from all angles, perhaps modify or set up alternatives and finally make a decision—one that is still open to reconsideration. Consequently, everyone has had a part in planning, as an individual or a part of a group, and everyone has a stake in the outcome.

10 During and after work time comes evaluation, another important thinking and talking time. For the child, after he has painted a picture or completed a science or mathematics experiment, it is satisfying to receive earned praise, listen to the reactions of others and consider with the group the results of his labors. Such experiences frequently lead to self-appraisal and improvement. The answers to "What did I or we accomplish?" and "Do we move ahead as planned or do we reconsider?" lead to next steps.

Pupil and Teacher Evaluation

The act of giving grades creates many a disturbing moment for teachers. But, unless pupils and teacher have an understanding that a piece of written work is for the pupil's own practice, experimentation or satisfaction, each serious endeavor should receive some kind of evaluation. Probably the best kind is a short or even a long note such as: "This is your best work—so far." "What happened to you today?" "This is a vivid description." "Good for you! Not a single spelling mistake."

If checking papers seems to take too much time, the teacher should realize that pupils should really *not* be turning in a multitude of papers each day. And as soon as possible, certainly by third grade and often in second, pupils should learn to proofread each other's papers in pairs, considering carefully meaning and errors, erasing and correcting mistakes, and discussing how the writer might have improved his work. Such papers could come as a result of work in science, explorations in mathematics, a social studies unit or work in the language arts. The teacher gives each paper a final look, making additional corrections in ordinary pencil (not in red, please!), as she reads.

As frequently as possible the teacher and the pupil have a writing conference. If it is writing the teacher feels shows particular promise, she can discuss with the pupil the possibility of his redoing it. Otherwise, the child should be allowed to move on to another experience. When he writes to capture an idea on paper, he has a right to do it in his own way. When a piece of written material goes out to readers, the writer makes it his very best work. For those who have great difficulty in attaining the muscular control needed in handwriting stories and reports or are overwhelmed by the intricacies of spelling, punctuating and structuring language, there are "scribes" or "secretaries" in each class to be borrowed for a period of time. Thus stories, poems and reports may be dictated.

Group Discussion

Small or large group discussions solve many problems which would tax to the utmost the individual teacher's time and judiciary powers. Out of such times (and these have to come as the need arises) come wiser attitudes, more mature values and broader understandings. Children can understand that it is much more difficult for Pete to attain acceptable standards of behavior than it is for Mary Sue; and therefore you adjust your thinking and don't condemn Pete as a bad boy, but rather commend him, if at all possible, for growth and progress.

Conversation need not become a lost art if teachers give it an opportunity to flourish and grow. Children like to consult with friends as they work on projects. On some days small conversation groups will evolve. Being a listening part of such groups is not only interesting, it is most enlightening!

Listening

Just as there are many talking times scattered through the day, so there are many listening times, times when pupils give courteous attention to each other or to the teacher

as she adds some information, makes a suggestion or helps someone think through a problem. Listening to the well-read story can be one of the special times in each school day. Talking about a book, interpreting the pictures, discussing the problems of the library selection committee, asking for favorites to be reread, playing a fragment of a story, telling one or reading aloud--these are all part of the reading program. The ear is the key to learning the patterns of speech, the patterns which are transferred to the pages of books.

Somehow teachers have rather assumed that when every pair of eyes is fixed intently on her that every pair of ears is involved. Boys and girls have an uncanny ability to "tune out" the spoken word at will, a tendency encouraged by hurtful environments of malnutrition and insufficient mental stimulation, dull explanations, long scoldings, and adult-style temper tantrums. The "next-next" barber shop style of reading—one line or one paragraph at a time around the class or group—can be counted on to eliminate most listening.

Better uses of listening times come as a few or the whole group hear and interpret lovely, expressive music; or the roar of thunder, the pounding of rain or the slither of sleet; or the nothingness of sound in a snow-covered world. Teachers should try to give each boy and girl an extra pair of "seeing glasses" and special "hearing aids." These help pupils gather more meaning from the world around them.

Physical Activity

Physical activity must be a respected part of the classroom living situation every day. Rhythmic response to music, group or individual work in the areas of construction and experimentation, changing from individual study to group work necessitate moving about; but regular, active times must be provided. Time on the playground is essential to a child's total well-being, for play serves many purposes. Through play children can re-create their experience and increase their awareness of self and culture. Play includes exercise and recreation, learning and using new skills, building strengths and endurance, increasing one's control of his body, learning to be fair.

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Play in its many forms is essential to life and we never outgrow our need for it. Those who have never played or have lost the ability to play or who have never been childlike frequently become our sick adults.

Whole Group, Small Group, and Individual Work

A good school day gives every child the opportunity to be a part of a group. There is a comfortable feeling of "belongingness" that can come from being one of a committee or experimental situation, a member of a special group or club, part of a gang, or one of a pair of best friends.

During each school day a child should have time as an individual to work at his own problems or in the fields of his own special interests, learning and discovering for himself—time he does not need to account for. Perhaps he works in the area in which he most needs special effort. For checking on gains, one pupil may want to enlist the help of a friend. Or perhaps he wants to look at or read a book; watch the fish in the aquarium; have a private talk; continue his research; or now and then just blissfully do nothing for a short span of time.

Often it is the individual (or small group) work that gives the children time to create to their own satisfaction. And out of these creations—a lovely design, a discovered song, a bit of poetry, a new-found ability, the verification of a hunch, results of a scientific experiment, the application of a generalization in mathematics—come immense satisfaction and increased power that give a child the willingness and eagerness to move on into something new.

Rest

In anticipating the daily rest needs, a teacher watches out for signs of fatigue and does not wait for droopiness or the comment, "I'm tired," before prescribing a change of activity. Tension, irritability, over-stimulation, restlessness—all tell the observant adult that the need is great; the time has come. A different task, taking a long stretch, being floppy dolls, having a brisk gymnasium period, drinking some milk or juice, nibbling on a carrot stick or eating a handful of raisins, listening to a quiet poem or some lovely music—all these are restful and relaxing things to do.

The School Community

Each day should bring contacts with an ever-enlarging, interdependent group of people —those who make up the school community. These contacts should be of both the impromptu and the planned kind. The pupils in a classroom may be made up of varied age groups—a most satisfactory combination—or more frequently of children within a narrow span. If the six-year-olds have just withdrawn a new book from the library and have thoroughly enjoyed it, let them plan to have another group come in to enjoy it with them.

The eight-year-olds may run the paperback book store. Another group, say the nines, might publish the school paper. One group assumes responsibility for the lost-and-found; and another runs the anti-litterbug campaign. It is a wonderful thrill for one child to be "borrowed" by a group of children because his help is needed.

Maybe the six-year-olds need some near-professional pounding to make their hideout hold together and may ask the nines to wield hammers. Or the seven-year-olds can carry milk cases for the fives.

Many good things that can be shared—favorite songs, special games, plays, creative clay work—gain new meaning and worth as they become important to others.

The Curriculum

As the pupil explores, inquires, examines, studies, researches, verifies and draws tentative conclusions and generalizations, learning follows learning in a semi-logical natural progression. Reading becomes a thing to be enjoyed and a satisfying source of information. Writing, spelling and punctuation are more and more important, as there are letters, stories, newspapers, directions, invitations, reports and even books to write when much has been discussed and needs to be said.

Pupils learn to observe, to test and try—not just to accept. They discover the importance of common sense but realize that this alone is not enough. They grow to respect their hunches, inclinations and impulses but again realize that these are not enough. They learn to withhold judgment until further evidence is in and then make generalizations with great care. There is much that is exciting to do, to find out. There are people to go to for help and consultation.

The Ongoing-ness

The curriculum and environment of the elementary school compose one of the worlds in which these boys and girls live and grow. It is the walk they took and what each child saw, remembered and enjoyed. It is what a teacher helped children record about the walk. It is the problem of how to help George find his talent to share with all the group. Curriculum is determined by real needs and real questions. What was the world like when our great-grandparents were alive? How soon can I read this book for myself? As a teacher gets to know the group, she can often supply the needed part of a curriculum in an anticipatory fashion. Is Ginny clouding up for a temper outburst? Then let's get her into another situation quickly. The brushes are well washed, but one more dip into the water for Martie's sake won't matter.

In Conclusion

This outlines a full program, especially since in it there is no place for rushing, tension, fears and inadequacies, pushing and fatigue; in it each child deserves to progress at his own rate of speed, and he has a right to his full measure of time and attention.

How does one put all these activities together so that they make up a good school day? Each teacher has to decide that question as he works with each group of children. Plans need constant revision. Perhaps one group will start with a talking time, move into small group and individual pursuits while the teacher has conferences, perhaps come back for evaluation, perhaps not; have a good play or gymnasium period and then a quiet time with some music followed by more work, lunch and rest; or alternate work and relaxation in its various forms throughout the day. With another group the teacher may do individual planning with some, while others pick up where they stopped the day before, or let work start as children arrive at school and then meet for a talking time. It will depend upon the maturity and needs of the group.

There is no prescription for some of the essentials of good days. Wouldn't it be wonderful if, just by marking in those silly little squares in plan books, we could add joy and laughter, tolerance and understanding, the feeling of being important, awareness of beauty, new insights and powers? Potentially, each of these ingredients is there waiting to be found, captured and made into a wonderful, joyous part of every day or lost and overlooked for lack of a sensitive spirit.

When both the teacher and the child leave the school satisfied with what the day has brought and happily and confidently anticipate their return tomorrow, this one has probably been a good school day.

14 Children's Thinking

By Audrianna Allen* and Marcus Ballenger

In recent years the interest of educators and parents has been focused more frequently on children's thinking. The 1966 Educational Policies Commission Report begins with the statement: "The development of intellectual ability and of intellectual interest is fundamental to the achievement of all the goals of American education."[1]

Renewed and increasing interest in the mental development of children has spurred research concerning the factors of intelligence. Around fifty heretofore unknown factors of intelligence, most of which are as yet unmeasurable, have been revealed through research. Researchers also report that IQ scores are not fixed but are subject to change, that differences in a child's environment can have a dramatic effect on his rate of mental development, that the development of traits within any one child vary, and that only a very small percentage of children are superior in *both* intelligence and creative thinking at the same time.

When do children think? Charlotte Crabtree says that "thinking occurs whenever children put ideas together in some pattern of relationship."[2] It is an active process that involves children's participation rather than the mere absorption of information. Challenging this thinking is an important responsibility of every teacher, whose aim should be to help children learn to depend upon higher and higher levels of thinking with more frequency.

The development of a child's personality and his intelligence ought to go hand in hand. There is, according to Jean Piaget, a succession of stages in the development of children's thinking as they move from infancy into the adolescent period of their lives. It is apparent that some educators are trying to accelerate this process. The questions we must ask are, is our task one of providing curriculum and instruction designed to stress cognitive development in the shortest time possible? Or is the task one of providing curriculum and instruction for the total development of the child?

Isn't it true that the child needs to live as fully as possible at each stage of growth if he is to fulfill his role as a mature adult? Pressure and attempts to hasten this process may well distort a child's development.

In What Kind of Thinking Can Young Children Engage?

Apparently young children are capable of engaging in most known forms of thinking. While no two educators seem to refer to types of thinking in the same way, some of the terms commonly used include:

[1] National Education Association, Educational Policies Commission, "Universal Opportunity for Early Childhood Education," 1966.

[2] Charlotte Crabtree, "Challenging Children To Think," *Primary Education* (Washington, D.C.: Association for Childhood Education International, 1965), p. 22.

*Based on a study of "Children's Thinking" done by the 1965–66 ACEI Primary Education Committee.

perceptualizing
recalling
memorizing
conceptualizing
identifying
associating
contrasting
grouping
labeling
generalizing
interpreting
making inferences
reasoning
sequencing
practicing inquiry
doing problem solving
reaching logical conclusions
evaluating
judging
predicting
being intuitive.

In another set of terms there is consideration of the use of convergent or divergent thinking, deductive or inductive thinking, cause and effect, critical thinking, or creative thinking.

Concept Building

Each time a child gathers and adds a bit of information about a topic, an experience, a word or an idea, he is confirming, building or enlarging upon a conception—one which will need to remain open to change for years to come. Concepts can grow out of experiences in involvement with people, things, places and ideas. Each new or related direct experience can add to a child's growing fund of reliable or partly reliable information. He has this much additional background to bring to the next upcoming experience.

Often it is the place of adults simply to stand by as children work at clarifying and extending their ideas. It takes numerous experiences to build a meaningful and reliable concept. One has to angle in on it from many approaches before reaching a still tentative conclusion.

One group of boys and girls were convinced that the stones in the playground were growing. Each day they became more excited about "those great big rocks," imaginatively seeing the playground covered with giant boulders. The teacher only needed to ask, "How can you find out if the stones are really growing?" One rock was brought into the classroom, carefully measured; each ensuing day its measurements were recorded. Day after day that rock "persisted" in remaining the same size. First a little water was placed with the rock. No change. Then a bit of earth was tapped in place around it. Still no change. Growing more subtle in their experiments, the children selected another rock and placed it cozily beside the first. Nothing happened. After several weeks the class reached a perfectly justifiable conclusion: "The rocks on our school grounds do not grow."

Not all children, nor adults, engage in the same kinds of thinking. There are those who advance patiently and carefully, one step at a time. Dorris Lee points out that, "One child learns rapidly by visual means but not auditory, another the reverse. Then there is the child who must act out physically and kinesthetically in one way or another to make an idea of his own." Not all children respond to the stimulus-response or rote style of learning.

And there are those who have hunches or take what Jerome Bruner calls "courageous leaps to tentative conclusions."

Jon showed this ability as he stood by the teacher while she was playing the piano, sometimes conversing with her, at other times thinking and considering, contemplating by himself, "Do you think Jeannie knows how cute she is when she is mad?"

The teacher's reply was a cautious, "Um. . . ."

Jon continued, "I wonder why we laughed yesterday when Richard fell down. It really wasn't very funny." Answering himself, he went on, "I think we laugh when we don't know what else to do. In time we'll know."

16 This time the answering "um hm" was less tentative.

Laura Zirbes frequently told the story of the children who could not get their home-made candles to wax, to grow fat. They examined the string wicks carefully, they looked again at the book telling how the pioneers had made their own candles, shook their heads over the hot pot of wax and tried again. After three quick tries they still obtained nothing more than damp strings very slightly wax encrusted.

After another quick conference the decision was made to let the wicks cool for a longer period between each dipping, then to dip them swiftly and hang them up for another cooling period. That procedure worked. The candles began to wax.

Bruner would have approved of these children working their way out of a dilemma, for he has said that the more they practice problem solving, the more likely they are to generalize what they learn into a style of inquiry that serves for any task they may encounter.

The situation in which the children learned about waxing candles was one in which the teacher gave children time to think, to try out alternate ideas and propose various plans. It was safe in this situation to "try ideas on for size."

Suchman relieves children of the burden of discovering everything for themselves but points out that inquiry is learning that is initiated and controlled by the learner himself as a means of expanding his own understanding.[3] Once the child finds this discovery process, he understands how others have gone through the same steps and he accepts their conclusions.

Positive School Atmosphere

The atmosphere of the school and the classroom in which the child lives is a most important aspect for developing reflective thinking. The living situation must be one of friendly acceptance of ideas and feelings; of encouragement for discovery and experimentation. Each child must have a strong feeling of self-worth developed in a climate in which he has been allowed to succeed frequently, fail without despair and disagree without reprimand.

An astronomer visiting one classroom said, "This is a rock from Indiana and tells us about earlier happenings there." Vaunie (a six-year-old) questioned his statement, "How do you know it came from here just because you found it here? Maybe it came from somewhere else." The astronomer had to smile as he perceived Vaunie's growing ability to listen with tongue in cheek.

Adequate Materials and Ideas

Children cannot think in a vacuum. They have to do it as they relate and organize their many experiences to find a common core of meaning. They gather meaning as they see, hear, smell, touch and taste; and every so often an overarching thought will emerge, tying several experiences together. There must be things (multimedia), people (young and old), ideas (good and not so good) plus much involvement.

Relating life in the real world and that of a dream or book world can be tied together by "thinking through."

Five-year-old Maura said, "Dreams! Are those the kinds of pictures that are funny that you see at night when you're asleep?" The family said they were. "I always forget to say

[3] J. Richard Suchman, "Learning Through Inquiry," Childhood Education, February 1965, p. 290.

something about them when I wake up!" The next morning when she came to the breakfast table Maura said, "I had a re-run last night on those pictures. It really is just like TV."

One first grader after turning the pages of his primer back and forth several times came to this conclusion, "I just know that all of these stories didn't happen in one day because the children don't always wear the same clothes."

Carefully Designed Questions

The depth of children's thinking can be influenced by the ways adults phrase their questions and by the encouragement they give children in asking questions and by children finding many of their own answers. The single-word answer, simple recall question (What is the state flower?) requires only memorization and recall of a fact. Questions must be carefully worded to develop the thinking process and lead to higher levels of critical thinking.

A few thought-provoking questions to keep on tap might be:

What would you have done?
Can you help me understand?
What were some of the things you wondered about while this was happening?
Let's see, now what might happen next?
How can you test this theory?
Who has some ideas about this?
Can you give us an example? Give us a "such as."
What do you think might happen if _____?
This is a real problem we can't seem to solve this way. How else could we start?
Where could we go for help on this?
Could this ever happen to us?
Does this make you think of something you have read or seen before? How could you find it again?
What might have caused that to happen?
In what other ways could this be done?
How can you tell the difference between _____?
Do you agree with this author? Why not?
Who has some other ideas on this?
What do you think about the source of this material? Let's do some comparing.
Is there anything important we have left out?
Yes, that's a reasonable answer. Now where do we go next?

Through their thinking boys and girls often follow up on semi-generalizations which they "research" again and again.

Jon showed his teacher a word on one side of the chalkboard, walked to a chart on the other side and said, "Put these two words together and you have a new word. Is that the way big words are made?" The teacher's "Um _____?" definitely had a question mark after it. Jon gathered long lists of words to prove his point to the teacher. She considered these with Jon but still her "Um _____?" left his conclusion up to some bit of doubt. Finally he came to her with two lists and said, "These big words are made up of two or three words and this one has four words in it. Then he sighed, pointed to a second sheet of long words and said, "Once in awhile there's a little word in these, but not always. Big words are made in different ways." The teacher's, "Right!" brought an answering smile.

Timmy spent days covering sheets of paper with numerals, some of which had bold black lines drawn through them; beside other numerals were precise check marks.

18 Approaching the teacher, bearing his sheaf of numeral-filled papers as evidence, he asked, "Did you know that any number no matter how big it is, is an even number if the digit in the one's place is even?" The teacher nodded and said, "Yes, I found that out too." Timmy looked at her, rather puzzled. "Well, if you knew, why didn't you tell me long ago?" Really, both Timmy and his teacher knew the answer to that one.

Creating with Children

Rose Mukerji 19

Creativity is one of the shining words. It lifts our spirits. It promises a rare, joyful event. As yet, no cynic has succeeded in tarnishing the image of creative experience.

The mystique of creativity has been successfully challenged by researchers without destroying its essence. They have probed its mysteries, analyzed its anatomy, revealed how it can be fostered. Fortunately, we can use their findings to nurture the creative potential within ourselves and within the children we teach.

We teachers may be reluctant to define creativity in the teaching/learning encounter, but we know a great deal about it. We sense the power of its intense involvement and deep commitment, the impact of its "peak experience." When a person creates, he can say with confidence, "I did it; it's good." The "it" rubs off on his person. He feels, 'I am worthy; I am good."

At times we all admire creativity and perhaps even envy it. Little wonder that we, ourselves, want to be more creative and want our children to savor the joy of creative experience in learning.

Why Creativity?

Our desire for creativity comes first. Then come the questions: *Why* do I want to be a more creative teacher? Do I want to be "in?" Do I want to escape the strait jacket of lesson plans? Do I feel the need to challenge myself—to use myself more fully? Might creative teaching turn my children toward a better sense of self?

It is important to be honest about *why* we want to engage in creative teaching. Then, we can consider if we want to pay the price for our choice. We should not be deceived by romantic illusion; creativity demands payment. If our familiar teaching strategies are found wanting, if we want to try an untried idea, and if we trust ourselves and our children enough, we take the risk of a creative new approach.

Risk-taking and Trust

It is evident that risk-taking is coupled with trust. Risk-taking grows upon trust, which in turn grows as a result of "having survived a risk. . .successfully."[1] *Mutual* trust between child and teacher is paramount, developing in its own slow way, through peaks and pitfalls that enjoin us and our children throughout the year.

As we search for ways to open creative experiences for children, we can expect frustration, uncertainty, failure. We can anticipate a conflict within ourselves: "Shall I take a chance and expose myself? Or shall I hold on to the familiar and play it safe?" Perhaps we can learn from the inchworm. He regularly takes risks into unknown space, but always from a point of contact, from a base of security. We might do the same. As adults responsible for young children, we do well to try to keep a toehold, at least, in the security of the

[1] Environmental Studies, *Essence*. Box 1559, Boulder, CO 80302. P. 14. (Copyright © by American Geographical Institute.)

known. This caution does not diminish our creativity. It is just good common sense; it helps us survive.

Stages of Creative Process

If we have thought through our personal reasons for trying to teach more creatively, and if we agree to take some of the risks necessary, some guidelines might help.

Researchers on creativity do offer some clues. They have documented four stages in the creative process and the conditions that foster creative activity. Each of the conditions implies teaching strategies for us to develop in a way consistent with *our* individuality and the uniqueness of our children in their educational setting.

Stage One: Opening Oneself

In the first stage, a person must have a "set" for the creative process and a sense that an important part of himself will be in it. He opens himself to many kinds of raw impressions and sensations. He does not censor; he does not pigeonhole into familiar boxes. In time, he internalizes the newness and finds a way to accommodate a changed bit of "knowing."

For example, six-year-old Marco knows that fingers are small compared to other parts of the body. Then, in the hospital, his vision is tested as he follows the arc of the doctor's

finger held close to his face. To Marco, the finger is huge; it blocks much of the doctor's face. He does not understand principles of perspective and relativity, but he absorbs the new image. Months later, an enormous finger dominates his mural about the hospital. It reflects the emotional impact of his new experience. He was open to new impressions; he internalized them; he used them.

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What clue does the first stage in the creative process provide for us as teachers? To begin with, we need to appreciate the integrity of a child's experience. In addition, we can provide raw data, new material, different sights, sounds and textures for the children: a Balinese gamelang, electronic music, natural bird calls, Indian chants, concave and convex mirrors. Ant hills and skyscrapers, marshes and sand dunes, excavations and clouds—all provide data.

As teachers we can avoid asking children to react, on the spot, to new data. These need to "simmer" and become part of oneself until one is ready to sense their personal meaning. But most useful of all is our own example of attending to everyday happenings: taking time to look at the darkling shadows on the floor, the quizzical glance of a child, the movement of a caterpillar.

We can also pose problems that spark a child's curiosity and engage his creative efforts: "Find something in this room, in this school or on the street that represents power. Then

show it by photo, pantomime, dance, picture or some other visual way so that we can see what you mean." Through these kinds of encouragement, children become more open to data that will feed their internalized visions from which they create.

In addition to a "set of openness," a person needs a sense of psychological safety at every stage of his work in order to create. He must be free of someone else's preconceived notion of what his results should be. Therefore, we should refrain from pressure through questions such as: "Why are you doing it that way? What are you going to do?" Chances are, he will not know until he has done it because he has never formed such a solution before. Without psychological freedom, a child's creativity will freeze and atrophy.

Stage Two: Selecting a Focus

In the second stage of the creative process, a person *selects a focus*. In doing so, he shows a certain playfulness and "fooling around." He improvises half-sensed, spontaneous acts. Finally, he may decide to show the important events in his life through photographs or through song fragments. Then he is on his way. He can now select the events and make judgments about what "tells his story" better. But do not expect him to stay with this stage. He may still vacillate back and forth, reaching for new ideas, a different approach, even a different theme.

What do we teachers do during the focusing stage? We try to set up the environment, including the feeling tone, in support of this "choosing" step. Materials, space, tools, equipment and time are obvious needs that we can supply. But there is more; we seek to clarify possible options.

For example, Maya, living near a busy city intersection, had heard about the quiet of the country. On her first visit there when she was eight, she could not sleep—strange noises made her apprehensive. Back home, she tried to deal with her frightening experience by making a "sound collage." In the confusion of remembered sounds and their imagined sources, it was hard for her to find some "handle" through which to form her expression. With a light touch, her teacher raises a question: "Do you want to make it sound like what you heard? Or the way you felt?" Then Maya is left to retreat into herself and to focus on either option or on a different one altogether. In this case, Maya chose to express her *feelings* about the threatening night sounds in the country. On her audiotape, she used a machine gun sound for the staccato of crickets and her own choked gargle for the rasp of the crows. She was on her way into the third stage.

Stage Three: Producing

The third stage of the creative process is clearly evident. The person *acts* to bring his focus into view. This is the stage of discipline and great productivity. The person can concentrate and persevere for long periods of time. He feels some satisfaction, some elation, and again some frustration. When he experiences a serious block, he may chuck the whole effort and go back to earlier stages of seeking new data or changing focus.

Once again, we teachers have a crucial role to play. If the creative activity is going well, we do not interfere; we allow it to flourish. However, when a child hits a roadblock that seriously threatens him, we may help him overcome it (if we have the know-how).

For example, a group of children are making an environment for a gerbil, but they are frustrated because the wooden cage keeps collapsing. The teacher shows them how corrugated fastners will stabilize their structure. They go on to accomplish their purpose. Such intervention does not interfere with problem solving; it enhances it. It allows the children's creative task to go forward. After all, what better function can we teachers serve than to help children learn what they want to know?

Stage Four: Stopping

The last stage in the creative process, which would seem to be easier than it really is, is to *stop*. Why is it difficult to finish? Because it says, "This is the best I can do now." One is then exposed to the outside world. Can the child trust his peers and us, his teachers, with his creative expression?

We may ask, "Are you satisfied?" and accept the reply. If, on the other hand, we intrude by saying, "See those blank spaces? Why don't you fill in all the background on your picture?", we are violating the child's prerogative. The whole point of creative experience—to build one's value system and to affirm oneself—is lost through such outside imposition. The decision for closure belongs to the creator.

Because the four stages of creative activity are intertwined with some movement back and forth, teaching strategies in support of creative learning have to shift with the child's need.

High Potential Creative Ideas

Of course we know that all children have creative potential. So do teachers. Are there ways that teachers and children, together, can enhance their creative learning? Yes. Certain kinds of challenges are more likely to foster creativity than others. The following tasks have been suggested as having high potential for stimulating creative activity if the contitions of trust, of freedom and of sensitive support are present:

1. Invent a language of your own.[2]
2. Find two things—one of which is responsible for the other.
3. Make a "commercial" for something you think nobody wants—and sell it.
4. Make a "commercial" for something everybody wants—and make them not want it.
5. Find/show some things that go up and down—but not in numbers.
6. Show "love and hate" in two ways, using different media.
7. Go outside and find/show a change that is predictable.
8. Find/show things that represent opposite ideas/attitudes.
9. Make an imaginary animal that crawls/flies.
10. Make a "sound collage" from sounds you collect/create.

Many of these suggested problems can be solved by using newer media, especially film. Newer media may serve to release creative energies that have been blocked in a child, or in an adult, who feels he has failed with more conventional forms of expression. The bulletin, Children Are Centers For Understanding Media,[3] is a fine resource for opening new channels of creative experience.

All of the problems suggested above are suitable for primary children. Interestingly enough, they are suitable for us adults as well. It is rare, in our society, to find activities to engage children and adults together on a par. When we do find them and share them, a contagious mutuality develops, and the benefits to both multiply in geometric proportion.

Creative learning requires knowledge, skill, and choices—choices engaging our value systems, our feelings, our desires and aspirations. Creativity demands our cognitive power and our affective power—in other words, our entire being. For these reasons, creative learning shines as a superior way of learning.

[2] Ibid

[3] Rice, Susan and Rose Mukerji (Eds.) *Children Are Centers for Understanding Media*. Washington, D.C.; Association for Childhood Education International, 1973.

had two
girls.

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Some Questions and Answers About Learning Centers[1]

Bob Hollenbeck
and Mike Radis

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What are Learning Centers?

They may be defined as areas in a classroom at which are placed materials for carrying out activities needed in the acquisition or reinforcement of a given knowledge or skill.

What are some major purposes of Learning Centers?

The primary use of Learning Centers is to promote independent learning skills. They help do this by:

- Freeing the teacher to work with small groups and individual students
- Allowing time for individual conferences
- Encouraging peer teaching
- Developing decision-making skills on the part of the learner
- Providing for self-evaluation.

What are general requirements for successful Learning Centers?

1. "Eye-catching attractiveness—something to attract children, [to encourage them to] want to investigate."[2] Intriguing pictures or provocative titles may be used to invite children to explore activities. For example, under the title "Get Wrapped Up in Math" may be a picture of a mummy. The mummy's wrappings could contain activities that suggest ways to meet the Center's objectives.
2. "Directions and stated objectives." The learners need to know why they are there and what to do independently.
3. "More than one assignment." Each assignment should offer a challenge, along with promise of success, based on multi-level expectations. The latter characteristic is particularly important so that every child can find a challenge and none be frustrated by failure.
4. "Answer sheets, if possible." Many kinds of self-checking can be utilized—such as puzzles (if the pieces fit together, the answer is correct), number- or color-coding (red question—red answer), answer-slides (moving an object or overlay exposes the answer).
5. "At least one open-ended response"—an activity that will lead the child to discover more as he or she works independently.

[1] Adapted from an article in **Insights into Open Education**, May, 1974. (Grand Forks, North Dakota: Center for Teaching and Learning, University of North Dakota).

[2] This suggestion and others quoted in this section were presented to teachers in unpublished mimeographed form by Joanne Duncan, Principal of the Wallingford Elementary School in Wallingford, Pennsylvania.

6. "Multi-media materials; such as books, pamphlets, magazines, films, filmstrips, slides, etc." Preferably these should be at different reading- and understanding-levels.

What are some guidelines for physical settings of Centers?

Usually, successful Learning Centers are located in quiet areas where a child can sit and work independently. Rather than be mere collections of mimeographed sheets, Learning Centers should involve children with games and other manipulative, problem-solving materials and activities, as well as those involving reading and writing. In the words of the old Chinese proverb,

I hear and I forget
I see and I remember
I do and I understand.

The physical set-up of a given classroom may help to dictate the use of Centers therein. Tables, chairs, carrels and other furniture in the room must be organized to produce the best possible lighting at each Center, as well as accessibility with the least possible disturbance.

How many Learning Centers are needed for a given group of children?

Although there is no arbitrary number of Centers that can be utilized, experience has shown that usually no more than four students can work effectively in a given Center at one time.

Howard Blake of Temple University suggests that a teacher should prepare materials for twice as many Centers as are in use at any one time in the classroom. According to this plan, a class of twenty-four children should contain a minimum of six Learning Centers in operation, and at least twelve additional Centers should be prepared for use.

How are Learning Centers used?

In a variety of ways. Most commonly, they become a tool to enrich or extend other learning experiences occurring in the classroom. Some teachers, however, organize their curriculum in such a way that Learning Centers become a dominant factor, to introduce, develop or reinforce content to be learned.

Some Learning Centers (such as Math and Science) may be required of all students, while some (such as Art and Music) may be put on an elective basis. Required Centers usually need to be replaced every three or four days while elective Centers may remain in operation for a longer period of time. Any Center not being used by pupils at all should be replaced.

The following additional helpful hints respond to concerns teachers often express about the use of Learning Centers:

"1. No lock step; any child can do any or all activities.
2. Teachers must explain and introduce the Centers to the class.
3. All children do not have to go to Centers. Those who cannot function at Learning Centers should not be forced to participate.
4. Children can be used to help other children at a Center.
5. Centers can be used as reinforcement for some children and as introductory learning for others.

6. There is need for continual diagnosis by the teacher to determine the level of ability of the children so that children are directed to the proper Center and the proper level within the Center.
7. Learning Centers need to be relevant to class development in a certain area and will have fulfilled their objectives when a majority of a class have completed them."[3]

How are Learning Centers evaluated?

As previously noted, an important feature of a good Learning Center is that activities in it can be self-checked by the learner. In addition, utilization of the Center should also be evaluated.

Evaluation ideally should be a continuous process, with the teacher aware at all times of the Centers at which children are working. Helpful for record-keeping purposes is a checklist, such as the following which has been used successfully by Mike Radis, one of the co-authors of this article:

To determine where pupils had been and what they had done during a week, each was asked to fill out this form and use it in conjunction with a weekly child-teacher conference.

NAME _____ DATE _____

CHART 1
LEARNING CENTER SCHEDULE

Center Number	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					

On this 8 ½" × 11" form was space for about twenty Centers. Each day the child would check on the left side of the dotted line the Center he planned to visit that day, and on the right side those he actually did use. As a result, the child gained opportunity to plan his time effectively; he was able to see for himself those Centers he wished to use but was unable to, and to reschedule them for another day.

At the weekly conference the child and teacher would look at and discuss some of what had been accomplished. The teacher also was enabled thereby to guide children into

[3] Courtesy of the Instructo Corporation, Cedar Hollow Road, Paoli, PA 19301. Used with permission.

28 Centers and Center activities, as well as to ensure that they were actually meeting success in those at which they had been working.

Other record-keeping devices might prove more suitable for other purposes. One teacher for example includes space on a form for children to make comments about work they have done at the Center. The important principle is that both children and teachers have some means of feedback to determine whether a specific Learning Center is valuable enough to retain for further use. Questions that need to be answered include the following:

How often was the Center used?
Did users meet success?
Did they become frustrated?
Was the Center attractive?
Were its objectives being achieved?

How get started?

Teachers who have not previously used Learning Centers in their classrooms but desire to do so are advised to begin slowly. One or two Centers should be carefully developed and introduced. As the teacher and pupils adapt themselves to using the Centers, more can be introduced.

It must be remembered that Learning Centers do not replace other forms of instruction completely; the teacher will still need to use large-group, small-group and one-to-one instructional patterns.

What is a sample-format for Learning Centers?

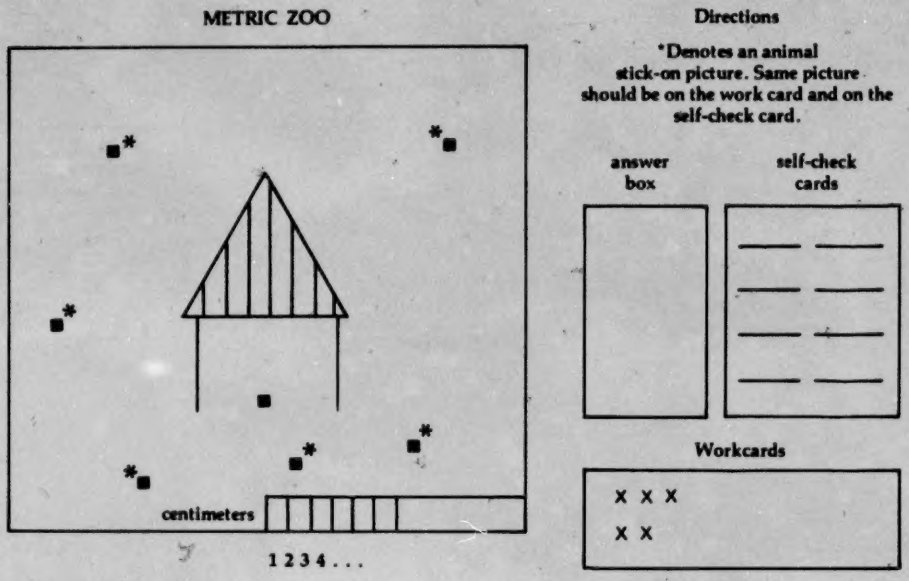
The following "Activity Center Format" is suggested by Howard Blake:
(With due consideration of appropriate readability-level)

1. Name of Center
2. Objective(s)
3. Clear directions and instructions for completing task(s)
4. Materials needed (books, consumable materials, etc.)
5. Directions, if necessary, for self-scoring ("Check answers on back of card. . .at the 'Answer Table,' " etc.)
6. Directions for recording progress (on personal chart, on chart at the Center, on classroom chart, etc.)
7. Directions, if appropriate, for what to do with the finished product ("Place it in envelope. . .in box. . .on teacher's desk," etc.)

Two examples of Learning Centers in Mathematics, designed by University of North Dakota students, follow:

I. METRIC ZOO

Objective: To introduce children to measuring with centimeters.
Directions: These animals. Help them find their way back to the Zoo.
(1) Pick up a card. (2) Put your name on the back. (3) To measure how far the three animals are from the zoo, take a string and measure from the black dot under the animal to the black dot at the zoo gate. (4) Hold the string up to the metric ruler at the bottom of the chart to find your answers. (5) Write your answers on the blanks on your card. (6) Check your answers on the check cards. (7) Put your card in the answer box.



Materials Needed: Construction paper, magic markers, stick-on animals, index cards, poster board with picture of zoo in the middle, animals at various distances from the zoo, a scale of inches on the top of the board (optional), a metric scale on the bottom of the board, string and an answer box.

Directions for Self-Scoring: Check cards are provided with the picture of each animal in plain view. When you pull the card out of the slot, it will show how many centimeters the animal is from the zoo.

Directions for Recording Scores: Each card will have blanks under the picture of the animal. The child will fill in the blanks with the number of centimeters.

Directions for Finished Product: After checking the answers, the cards will be put in the answer box.

II SINK YOUR MIND INTO SETS AND SUBSETS

Objectives: Children will be helped to:

a) Identify number of elements in a set

b) Make up sets of their own from a given set—lead into subsets

c) Recognize that the objects in a set don't have to be the same size, color or shape.

This Center is geared for first and second grade pupils.

The Center has four envelopes with a different activity in each. The large instruction sheet has a row of different colored blocks along the top. Each envelope has a colored block on it that corresponds to those on the instruction sheet.

For example, if the color sequence on the instruction sheet is red, blue, yellow and green, then the child would know to work through the envelopes starting with red, moving on to blue, yellow and then green.

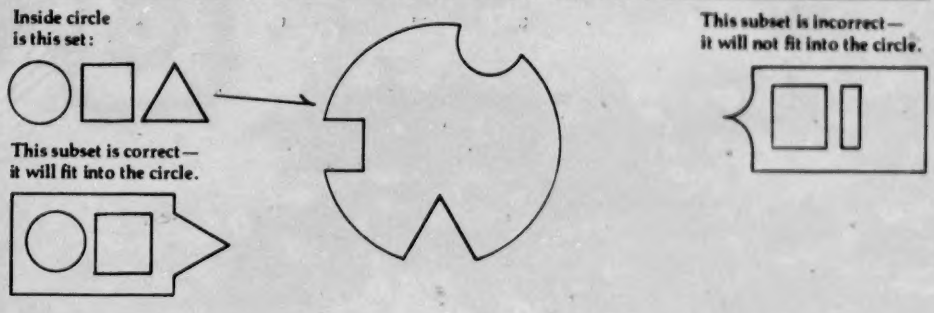
The first activity includes cards with sets on them. Below each set are a series of numbers that tell how many elements might be in that set. The child chooses an answer and then checks his answer by matching up the color in the corner of that card with the

answer card having that same colored corner. A paper punch is used on the answer card, so when the child fits the two cards together, the answer shows through the hole.

The next two envelopes include work telling how many elements are in the set and how many different sets can be made from this given set. Shapes can be cut out and children can glue them on paper so the teacher can have a way of telling what the child has done.

Below each question is a series of possible answers. After the child has chosen the correct answer, he flips a strip of paper over from the back and the correct answer appears in the cut-away circle. This exercise includes shapes of the same color, the same shapes but different sizes and colors to help the children see that a set doesn't have to be of one shape, size or color.

The last activity includes a circle with a given set in the middle and different shapes cut into the border. The children are told, first, to pick out all the possible subsets that can be made from this set from the ones offered on strips of paper. Each strip that contains a correct subset will have a shape cut out of the end of that strip that will fit into the larger circle. If the wrong subset is chosen, then the shape at the end of that strip will not fit into the circle and the child will know he has made a faulty choice.


Inside circle is this set:
This subset is incorrect— it will not fit into the circle.
This subset is correct— it will fit into the circle.

When the child has finished the exercise, he would mark an X beside his name corresponding with the color part of the envelope he has finished.

	Red	Blue	Yellow
Pat	X		
Betty	X	X	

Conclusion

The use of Learning Centers helps implement a concept that has been with us for a long time; that is, concern for the individuality of the learner. They enable the teacher to focus on helping each child grow in his or her ability to manage independent learning.

Editor's Note: Here are several helpful resources for additional information about Learning Centers. A much more extensive annotated bibliography may be found in ACEI's *Selecting Educational Equipment and Materials for School and Home*. Washington, D.C.: The Association, 1976.

Association for Childhood Education International. *Learning Centers: Children on Their Own*. Washington, D.C.: The Association, 1970.

Voight, Ralph. *Invitation to Learning: The Learning Center Handbook*. Washington, D.C.: Acropolis, 1971.

Waynant, Louise and Robert Wilson. *Learning Centers - A Guide for Effective Use*. Paoli, PA: Instructo Corporation (McGraw-Hill).

Open Education – An Overview

Dorothy Anker 31

Recent evaluations of Head Start programs indicate that although children involved in preschool programs make measurable advances as opposed to control groups, these same children tend to lose their advantage shortly after they enter public schools. The focus has been shifting to an evaluation of the primary grades. Many designs are being attempted, among them a program which has been variously labeled the "open classroom," the "integrated curriculum," the "informal classroom," the "developmental classroom," or "open education."

What Open Education Is Not

Open education is not teachers talking *at* children. The process of open education does not occur in a formal setting where children may color a picture or pursue an interest in the back of the room or out in the hall after they have finished their workbooks. The open-education classroom is not one in which children engage in free play while teachers abdicate their roles because they can only "teach" during the structured time. Open education is not a packaged kit of materials designated as the instructional medium and water play as the tension-relieving activity. Open education is not a team of teachers assigned to different areas of the room who then proceed to give a lesson to those children who choose to come to their areas. The open-education classroom is not a place that gives children license to romp and rave and do as they please. "Openness" is not to be mistaken for lack of structure.

What It Is

What then IS open education? First and foremost, it is hard, hard work. It is a program based on respect for the worth and integrity of the individual and his inalienable right to pursue knowledge, to think, to question and to draw his own conclusions. Not in the least contradictory is the principle that teachers should view themselves as vested with authority and expertise—as adults committed to progressive competency in themselves as well as in all those with whom they interact.

Open education requires a teacher-child interaction guided by mutual respect and trust, predicated on the assumption that children want to learn and will learn according to their own fashion. Open education is viewed as a process wherein teaching is the encouragement and enhancement of each child's thrust toward mastery. It involves a child-child relationship devoid of expectations for conformity or for competitiveness; it supports openness of self and sensitivity to others. Open education takes place in a decentralized structure: an open, flexible space divided into functional areas. This space may be one large room, a few small rooms or a classroom and hallways. It is a carefully planned arrangement of rich and varied materials and learning resources (often quite simple and homemade).

All of these factors—structure, materials, teacher, and children—interact to stimulate and extend the most important element of learning: the child's existing individual responses to the reality of his ongoing experiences. Crucial to this process is the provision

32 of ample choices so that each may learn in his *own* way, at his *own* pace, for his *own* purpose. With a structure and materials, the teacher capitalizes on the child's natural curiosity by providing an environment rich enough to foster curiosity and free enough to engage each in the quest to satisfy that curiosity. The teacher in the open education classroom seeks to facilitate, enable and encourage the process of learning in directions established cooperatively with children.

The model for today's open-education classroom is the British Infant School, although the philosophy is reminiscent of John Dewey and the progressive education movement. To those of us in early childhood education, it recalls the words of Froebel, the McMillan Sisters, Susan Isaacs, Montessori and Piaget. Today, we can see open or informal classrooms in a variety of American schools from rural Vermont and North Dakota to major urban centers, from inner-city Watts and Harlem to exclusive private schools in New York and Boston, from struggling alternate and cooperative schools to old and established university laboratory schools. And, of course, the open-classroom model can be seen in many child development preschools. Even the Federal Government has become involved in disseminating the concept. In the 1970s, the Office of Economic Opportunity sponsored open-classroom training centers in nine cities as part of the Follow Through Program for continuing the social and intellectual growth of children who had been involved in the Head Start programs.

Close-up

Let us take a moment to visualize a typical open classroom. It may be composed of a multi-aged group say of five-, six-, seven- and eight-year-olds. Family grouping, as this organizational arrangement is sometimes called, is an important element in many open classrooms because it presumes that mutual teaching and learning will take place among children. However, there are open classrooms for single-grade units, such as just kindergarten children or just second graders. If you arrive early, you will find that others have preceded you and are engaged in mixing paints, reading, using math equipment or just talking with friends. Teachers and children drift in, make comments to each other, and become involved. The children may gather as a group for a short time, more often not. Instead of desks, there are tables and interest areas. We may find an arts area with a water table, sand, clay and paints; a block area; a math area; library; science area; language-arts area; and housekeeping corner (called a "Wendy house" in England), complete with dress-up clothes. Each is filled with a variety of equipment, games and materials. The teacher goes from child to child or works intensively with two or three children. Sometimes he or she can be seen standing back observing children at work and jotting down notes in a little book. This record keeping is an essential element in the open classroom because from it the teacher plans for each child's ongoing growth. The work is not easy but the teacher invariably looks happy, and the children are everywhere—sprawled on the floor, grouped around tables, out in the halls or outside in the playground.

Children are encouraged to keep track of the things they do, to help each other; and to carry out some responsibilities for the classroom. Sometimes the teacher will assign a math or reading task to a child; or will work with children individually for a few minutes; but in every instance, will try to avoid interrupting them when they are in the middle of a chosen task.

Some Comparisons

If we now compare the criteria for open education as it exists in many British infant schools (and some junior schools as well) with traditional education and emerging struc-

BOXES

tured methodologies here in America, perhaps we can gain a clearer perspective of what open education means.

The closed school or traditional approach begins with an analysis of knowledge and skills required for adequate functioning in the society as it exists, ignoring, for the most part, the fact that other skills might be necessary twenty years hence. These prescribed bodies of knowledge and skills are then broken down into sequenced units and are assigned to particular age levels. Children's capabilities, relevancy of subject matter and motivational issues are considered in matching the units of learning to the grade levels. Although the units are packaged, and sometimes attractively seductive, the fact remains that they are usually rigidly structured and preordained.

In contrast, advocates of open education are more consciously concerned with the process of education and with helping children to learn rather than with a series of instructional units. Here in America, we seem intent—beginning in the preschools—on identifying and then teaching a series of concepts and drills supposedly crucial for later learning. In England, an increasing number of teachers perceive the curriculum as a series of starting places that emerge from questions or observations. One idea leads to another, and teacher and child are engaged in learning. British teachers encourage, stimulate and guide, but only rarely do they directly prescribe the learning experience.

It follows then that a critical difference lies in the focus on freedom and choice of learning experiences versus a prescribed system of teacher-selected learning tasks., Many British teachers (though perhaps not yet a majority of them) have been greatly influenced by Piaget's work. They have accepted his premise that adaptive thinking and action develop in sequence, are related to age and cannot be rushed. They recognize that the ages at which children can understand different concepts vary among children, depending on capacity and the quality of their physical and social environment. Teachers in successful informal classrooms have put into practice Piaget's formulation of effective learning—that children must experiment to see how things work, that they must manipulate objects and symbols, ask questions and seek answers, resolve incongruities, generalize and test their findings against the perceptions of others.

But it is not only preoccupation with intellectual development that guides the principle of choice of learning experiences. The open-education philosophy focuses on self-motivation and self-direction; on independence and responsibility. The development of such attributes are necessary for a society that depends on creative, active involvement of its citizens for its existence.

In short, open education is predicated on person-oriented education of the whole child, irrespective of the subject matter versus the traditional object-oriented education that prescribes the subject matter, and in which the child is only seen as a receptacle.

Open education, then, in no way suggests an unplanned curriculum. On the contrary, instead of one plan, the teacher must develop an assortment of plans. The demands for keen, insightful observation, a carefully preplanned responsive environment and premeditated structuring for appropriate learning events would make it an inappropriate design for *all* teachers simply because of the extensive skills and planning such a program requires. But this kind of planning is essential, for no child exists in a vacuum nor ought he interact aimlessly and superficially with his environment. Rather, the classroom becomes an arena where the inner subjective qualities of the child become related to the outer cultural realities as they exist in the room, in the school and in the community. The kind of planning we speak of in open education focuses on the potentialities of the child

and those that exist in the environment. It requires the structuring of real situations containing a wide range of educational alternatives.

Some Precautionary Notes

If the implementation of open-education principles requires that much work, why are teachers flocking to this approach? Perhaps because American educators are fad-oriented. Even in the past few years I have seen places that call themselves open classrooms but bear absolutely no resemblance to the real thing. Just as progressive education failed without ever having been tried, so will the open-education concept be doomed to an early death if we insist on making it a universal phenomenon or try to transplant the British system unchanged. Although many American teachers have been studying in England, and we have been bringing British primary school personnel to speak and work in America, we need to question seriously the advisability of transplanting a system from one culture to another. Ideologically the words that span an ocean sound quite similar but in practice our philosophies diverge. Some values and priorities in Britain are very different from those we hold dear in America. Children are not reared in the same manner nor do we share exactly the same expectations and aspirations for our youth.

For example, Americans have always equated entrance into first grade with traditional "book learning." In those states that have kindergarten programs, people have accepted a somewhat freer and less structured program, although all too often the focus has been on preparing children for first-grade instruction. In much of England, and more recently in Sweden, which converted its entire educational system, no such dichotomous treatment of children occurs. There, children are accepted as individuals from the moment they enter school at three, four or five until they leave the primary school at eleven. We, too, are eliminating the dichotomy but in the opposite direction—by introducing more and more structured, prescribed instruction into our kindergartens and preschools.

Perhaps Americans need to ask some of these critical questions: Why are we so obsessed with measurable achievement and competitive standing? Why do Americans always ask Piaget how intellectual development can be accelerated? Why the dichotomy between pleasure and work? Why the need to establish authority structures and hierarchies? Why do we insist on developing the *one* approach for *all* children? Everyone—schools of education, publishing firms, toy manufacturers, innovators—all are seeking a panacea. We seem to feel constrained to implement *the one* ideal method in every classroom, in every school, in every district, in every section of this great country. Compare this with a statement taken from the Plowden Report, *Children and Their Primary Schools* (1967), the most substantial research-analysis of British primary education:

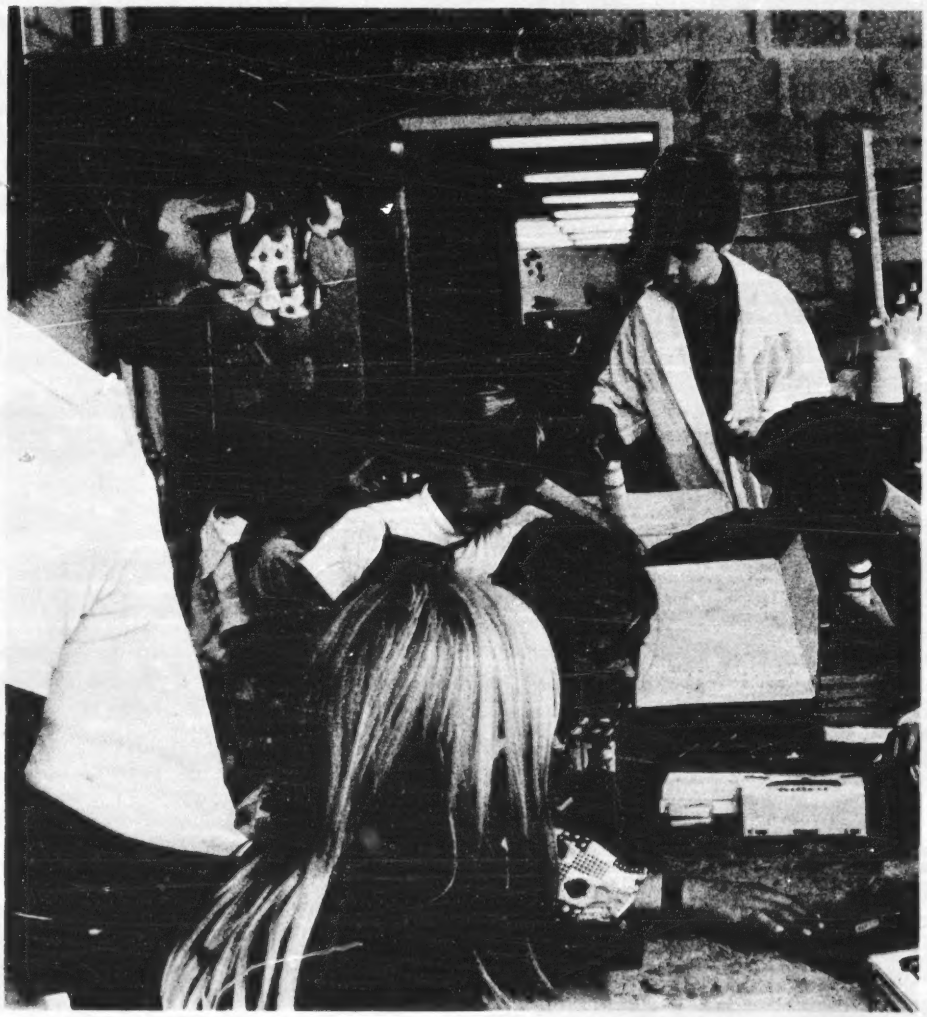
> The only uniformity of practice that the Board of Education desires to see in the teaching of public elementary schools is that each teacher shall think for himself and work out for himself such methods of teaching as may use his powers to the best advantage and be best suited to the particular needs and conditions of the school. Uniformity in detail of practice is not desirable, even if it were obtainable.

The development of open education must, by its nature, take time and must also, on the basis of its underlying principles, be subject to diversity among classrooms. Conformity and openness are contradictory terms. The structure, the content, the degree of openness and the methodologies involved cannot and should not be universal if we sincerely believe in the concept of meeting people's needs.

Therefore, no *one* "ideal" or "model" open-education classroom can exist. Nor can we look to a committee to devise and disperse a preordained curriculum. American educators

36 must re-examine their values and priorities. Do we truly value diversity, or do we merely accept differences? Are we committed to a creative learning process based on respect for the individual's idiosyncratic choice and manner of learning, or are we slaves to the prevailing cultural value of production-line procedures designed for efficient and systematic "teaching"? Shall we muster our energies to seek methods for developing each child's array of potentialities, or continue to focus on the discovery of methods that dictate how children can get ahead the fastest?

Only when we answer such questions can we begin to think in terms of open-education classrooms that may be as different from each other as are the people whom they serve. We may well be guided by the principles of open education, but we must be prepared to value the diversity that will inevitably exist. Classrooms will take form based on the needs of communities, children, and teachers—all of whom will need to experiment to find their own unique balance of content and process. Such experimentation must be based on trust, freedom, responsibility and commitment by parents, teachers and administrators.



Approaches to Discipline

Joanne E. Bernstein 37

Children are more likely to mature as effective, self-disciplined human beings if they grow up in an environment of genuine democracy—one based on true respect for growth patterns, ideas and feelings. In such a setting children are not viewed as possessions, as small appendages of their parents or teachers.

But though we adults may profess to acknowledge the importance of free exploration of the environment, we often find it hard to watch children make mistakes or ineptly manipulate materials. Part of the problem may stem from falsely viewing children's performances as reflections of our own.

As their mentors, we may find ourselves dabbing as they paste or inpatiently completing the "finishing touches" as they dress. On the other hand, when we allow children to improve their own motor skills as they paste sloppily or as they put their sweaters on inside out, we say something different: "I'm glad that you are becoming what *you* must become, in the style *you* must follow."

We then are in a position of advantage; because our own egos are not as emotionally involved in our children's accomplishments, we can see their ideas, feelings and rationales with greater clarity. We can thereby function legitimately as guides, helping them work through their thinking without imposing our own.

Underlying any plan for democracy in the classroom is the concept that the worth of *each* person is regarded as important. The resultant natural and mutual respect leads, in turn, to cooperation. By way of contrast, in a classroom where demands for unquestioning obedience are made, the results are all too often fear and guilt.

Learning To Be Responsible

Within an environment of democracy, children are given freedom to take on responsibility and make decisions. It has long been common practice for us to ask children to maintain equipment in the classroom. But how often have we consulted them on the arrangement of learning centers, on the rotation of materials therein or on the determination of scheduling?

We help children build positive self-images when we offer them opportunities to make decisions that are meaningful to school life, provided that the responsibility offered is genuine and nonmanipulative. If we bring our pupils in on classroom furniture placement or materials distribution, we are obligated to follow through and abide by their decision even when it is not the most efficient or wise. If we truly see only two or three acceptable solutions to the problem, we can inform them of the only open alternatives before turning over responsibility to them. But if the field of choice is indeed not limited, they—and we—have much to learn from an unwise decision. Providing there is no safety hazard, we can all live with the outcomes.

In one crowded classroom, the first graders wrestled with the problem of clearing enough room to have two double easels for painting. If the easels were set up near the

sink, they would encroach upon the library corner. Upon the children's suggestion, the reading area was moved near the blocks. It was soon found that while painters had adequate room, readers suffered from the noise of wood banging.

What matters most is that children themselves can see the consequences, good or bad, stemming from their ideas. Together teacher and children can take time to discuss and evaluate their decisions.

PREVENTIVE DISCIPLINE

No single disciplinary technique will in itself produce a person who has self-confidence, self-discipline, and, at the same time, a sense of reality. Discipline is not a decision of the moment. It is a long-term investment, in which certain techniques are useful at certain times. When we over-utilize one approach, we may find it counterproductive, because careful thought and examination of the unique nature of a problem might be replaced by formulas.

Feelings Come First

Preventive discipline is a phrase encompassing various ideas and programs that aim at avoiding big problems before they come about. One aspect of preventive discipline calls for us to carry out a self-examination of our values, ideals and goals. As we reflect on our expectations for children's behavior, occasionally we conclude that they may be unrealistic or unwise.

For example, Tim and Janet, two third-graders, have been made unnecessarily and prematurely conscious of (and therefore irritated by) their heights because of a practice in their classroom of assigning children places in walk-lines according to size. Their teacher may well ask if there is real justification for retaining this procedure or if it stems rather from a misdirected sense of order. Analysis of our feelings may cause us to change our action-patterns in a host of similar situations. Insights gained from such observation can help create positive plans for dealing with individual problems.

Avoiding Role-stereotyping

Preventive discipline accentuates the positive. Our own efforts at self-acceptance, at viewing ourselves positively, are essential if we are not to fall into the two traps of unconsciously scapegoating children whose faults resemble our own or of unfairly labeling children. This task is more difficult than it sounds, for as we all know, we are willing to forgive others their faults more easily than we forgive ourselves. When we set preestablished expectations, we may place children in unwanted roles from which they cannot escape (*clown, bookworm, goody-goody, all-thumbs*).

We can check our impulses to be critical by allowing the expression of feelings directly related to actions that annoy, and avoiding casting emotions onto innocent objects or persons. Expressions of feelings must be allowed both teachers and pupils, in a setting where each is aware that the other has changeable moods. As we come in touch with our own feelings and those of others, we create an environment where emotions are vented on actions, not persons. ("Children are not for hitting!" instead of "You're always so quick to hit.") By praising children when they can express *their* feelings in ways that don't accuse or brand, we acknowledge our concern for each of them.

Watching Our Words

Important as the discussion of feelings may be, the thought we devote to our classroom language must go still further. For example, another way we can improve rapport with

pupils is by making our teacher-statements clear and explicit. Straightforward statements lessen the danger of misinterpretation, and of such corollary problems as mutual annoyances, anger or confusion. "The puzzle is in the case near the door" is much clearer than "The puzzle is over there." "Walk around the ladder" is more easily understood than "Be careful."

Two more effective tools of language usage are *cueing* and *prompting*, whereby notice is given before an act, preventing later problems. Sometimes the cueing can be direct ("On your mark, get set, go!"), and sometimes it can take the form of an indirect reminder ("Who has a puzzle to complete before cleanup?"). It can even be automated, as in classroom work charts, or be diminished over a period of time (as when the cue to take off boots gets shorter and shorter, finally becoming a nonverbal but readily understood signal).

What About Punishment?

But suppose that, although we take all of the above measures and more, classroom problems persist? What if our preventive disciplinary techniques do not appear to work? Is punishment the alternative?

Punishment clearly is *one* alternative, but it should be regarded as a last resort. For, in the long run, it usually leads to more of the undesirable behavior, plus possibilities of such side-effects as bedwetting, dependency and undue aggression. Punishment also has other disadvantages. It may teach not that one shouldn't misbehave, but that one shouldn't get caught. Sometimes punishment may have elements of humiliation, which can cause children to be resentful of authority. Moreover, it may have possibilities for creating notoriety, the rewards of which may lead the child to seek further fame by questionable means. Children who are punished regularly begin creating imaginary ledger systems in which they figure out their debts, bursting forth at times with unexpected behavior and seemingly asking for punishment when they feel they are due. When the punishment is delivered, the books are balanced, and the game can begin all over again.

Praise and Reward

Instead of punishment, some teachers or parents use positive conditionong and reward to modify behavior. They give deep thought to just which acts they want reinforced. Giving praise or tangible rewards when positive behaviors are present, they ignore negative behaviors. This method may work particularly well with short term issues. It requires fortitude and alertness to small improvements, as success comes in small doses. A simple example: Sally has a habit of slamming doors in the classroom. Assuming a safe environment, her teacher can set a plan in motion: to control irritation when Sally slams the door and await a time when Sally does not slam. Teacher then smiles, "You closed the door very quietly that time." She avoids negating the praise by combining it with a derogatory remark, such as "Now, why didn't you do it that way before?"

Children basically like to please, and if the reward is given each time (and after that intermittently) the undesirable behavior will probably cease to be a problem. It may prove helpful for the teacher to note the incidents of positive and negative behavior in writing; thereby it is easier to get an initial objective view of the severity of the problem and to see more readily the rate of progress.

Although Andy's whining appears to be constant, charting its frequency may surprise the teacher by telling her it is really only a small portion of his day. Then the attempt to curb it does not seem to be as overwhelming.

40 One serious criticism of behavior modification techniques is that although the behavior may be altered, attitudinal changes are often not stressed (they may or may not follow).

Fair Play

Studies of children's development show that children in the early years do not yet have deep attitudes of caring whether or not something they are doing is unfair or uncooperative. Their departure from "I want what I want when I want it" is likely to be a very slow one, so verbal arguments for attitude change will not get very far. With young children, it is in no way a defeat to avoid quibbling and use other means in order to end disagreements in the classroom. One way to keep down teacher tempers is to sing reminders rather than scold. A sudden physical and/or intellectual challenge often gets unwilling children to change their minds. "All children wearing blue, hop to the door!" works better than "Get your coats on and line up!"

Living with Consequences

Many teachers employ Dreikurs' system of natural and logical consequences in their classrooms. A *natural* consequence is when the teacher allows children, within a framework of health and safety, to experience the consequences of their actions. For example, kindergartener Sam insists upon playing with water without a smock. His teacher allows him to do so. Sam discovers that the rest of his morning is rather damp and uncomfortable; however, *he* is in control. His teacher is not angry and resists saying "I told you so." Thus Sam learns what he can expect from the physical world, and is a bit more mature for the experience.

In a *logical* consequence situation, the result does not take place as a matter of course but is invented by the teacher, in keeping with the act. Lisa has been disruptive during story-telling time and ignores the teacher's request for attention. Teacher: "If you do not feel that you can listen to a story now, you will have to sit in another part of the room." When Lisa persists, the teacher removes her and says: "I see you do not feel like listening to a story now. Perhaps you will want to try again tomorrow." Lisa is not being "punished" since she has been apprised of what the consequences of her act would be and *she* makes the decision. She is also aware that the teacher has confidence in her.

Summary

Disciplinary training for children should seek to establish lifelong patterns of self-reliance and self-direction. The teacher's role in this process must incorporate both control of self and the execution of well thought-out plans.

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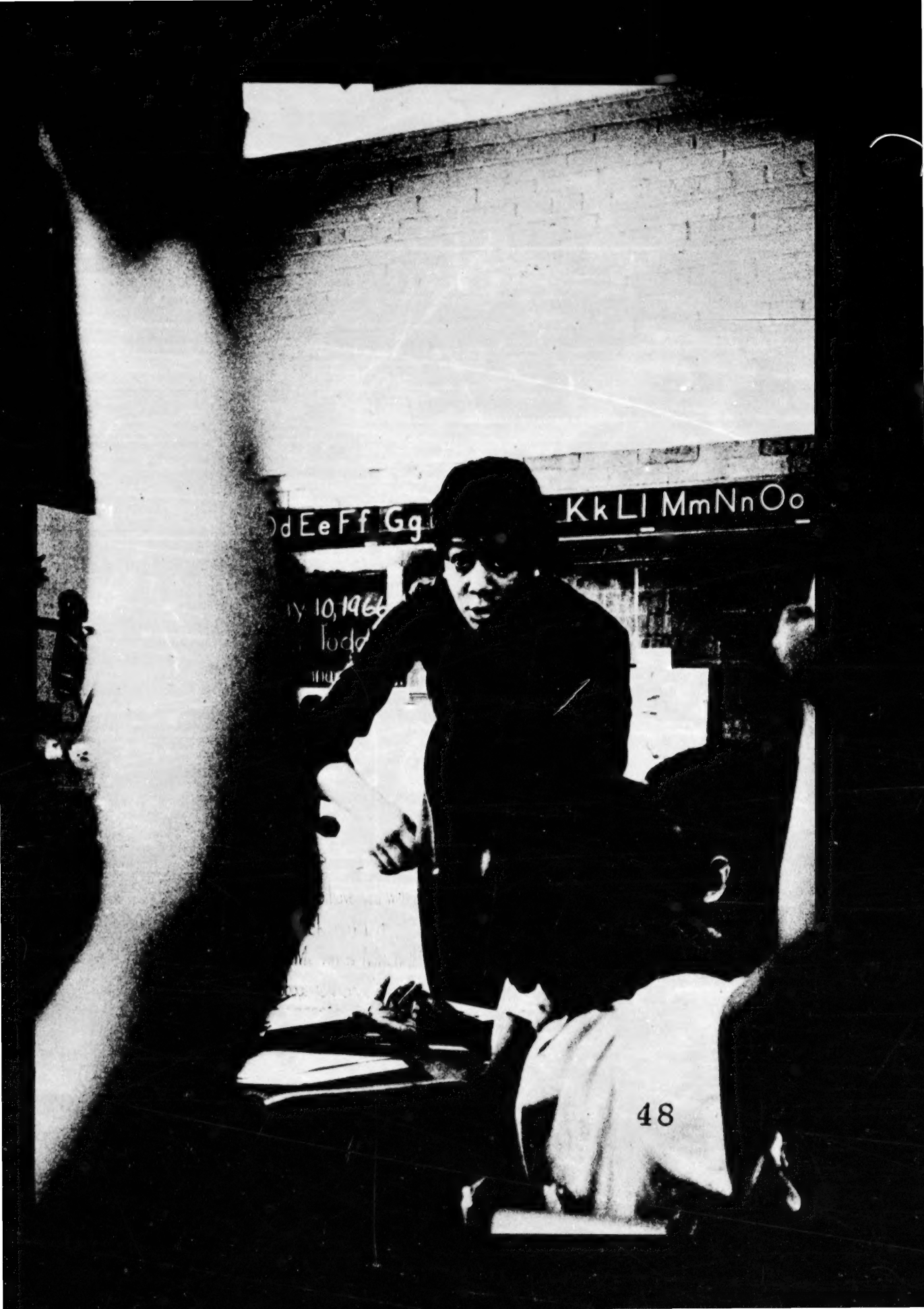
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42 Working with Aides

Dorothy W. Gross and Nancy Balaban

Why do teachers and aides so often find working together a complex matter? Why is it that this relationship is as frequently defined by rivalry and tension as by satisfaction and cooperation? Let us define the interaction by referring to the following three basic elements: (1) the developing *relationship*, (2) how each person sees his/her *role* and (3) the way classroom *responsibilities* are worked out. These three R's of shared teaching—relationship, role, responsibility—will structure the classroom environment, and thereby the children's learning, more significantly than any list of specific do's and don'ts. Let us take them one by one.

RELATIONSHIPS

This, of course, is the heart of the matter. What relationship means in a working context is an interaction characterized by concern for each other's feelings, courtesy and open provision for development of each other's talents, skills and understandings. A working relationship does not need to be the same as a personal friendship. Whereas a personal friendship does depend on shared interests, and focuses on them, as well as on compatible political beliefs and congruent living styles, the touchstone of a working relationship is the needs of the children. But the needs of the children cannot be served unless the adults are sensitive to each other.

Concern for Feelings

Feelings play a major role in the marriage of professional and paraprofessional—as they play a major role in relations between teacher and child. Feelings of shyness, of fear of error and criticism, of competitiveness, of desire for praise and approval, of need for achievement underlie and shape behavior more tellingly than formal education.

Similarly, aides' and teachers' feelings about their past experiences as children in school greatly affect their working relationship. If they were liked by teachers and other students, if they liked school, then they probably have positive notions of "teacher" and may wish to be like those teachers whom they remember. On the other hand, if school memories are fraught with feelings of fear, of boredom, of dislike, then they may be more likely to act towards children in school in a way that closely resembles those negative experiences.

We all tend, in life's relationships, to repeat many of our earlier experiences. But knowing that the past creates emotional color in the present can lay the foundation for sharing those feelings about school that were shaped in the past. Naturally, before a teacher and an aide can communicate in a meaningful way about school, they must first recognize that each may have had a different past school experience, and so possibly, a different approach to teaching.

Teachers' training often acts as a buffer to those memories. Their training has provided them with the opportunity to reconsider their past ideas about education. Aides, without

formal training, may remain closer to those past experiences without the opportunity to consider them in a broader framework. Both closeness to early experience and a trained perspective are needed for enriched classroom life.

Courtesy

What an old-fashioned idea courtesy appears to be! And how often it is observed in the breach! Do you introduce your aides/assistants to classroom visitors? Are your aides/assistants given any options regarding work-tasks? Do they have a place in which to keep their things? Are they included in faculty meetings? Are their opinions solicited when decisions about the children must be made? Many of these questions, of course, have implications beyond the mere routines of politeness—and that is exactly the point. Courtesy, in the broad sense of considered caring for another person, is a crucial aspect of the teacher-aide relationship. The connection with the domain of feelings, discussed above, is obvious.

Development of Talents, Skills and Understandings

This is an area that, like concern for feelings, falls more squarely in the teachers' purview than in the aides'. As professionals, teachers have legal responsibility for the classroom; as such, they have more latitude in providing opportunities for assistants to advance their learning. Specific methods and techniques for doing this are suggested below; here our concern is with the attitudes involved in encouragement of such growth.

If the children's learning depends partly on effective teaching—and if some of that teaching is done by an aide/assistant—it would seem to follow that the aide should be given every opportunity to learn about children, about teaching technique, and about curriculum. In such a context, helping a paraprofessional to learn is necessary if the children are to learn. (The firm assumption here is that the aide will be involved with the children in a teaching capacity.)

Since people learn best when their native styles and abilities are respected and when they are encouraged to try things on their own, teachers might consider having their assistants introduce into the classroom materials and ideas that are reflective of their own life experiences. Sometimes teachers are frightened by such an open sharing or worry lest they will be criticized by administrators or other teachers. But, in all cases, the teachers will be in charge—observing their assistants, helping, explaining and discussing the experience when it is completed.

In addition, teachers need to open themselves to possibilities of learning from assistants. Since most paraprofessionals are residents of the immediate school community, they are often storehouses of understanding of family living patterns, community values and children's behavior outside school. An aide's intuition about a child is often a valuable complement to the teacher's more trained knowledge about child development in general. The give-and-take implicit in such an approach often runs into difficulty because of conflicts between real needs and role expectations, our next area of concern.

ROLE EXPECTATIONS

We all have notions of how teachers should behave. Some feel that teachers should be the ultimate authorities in classrooms, the ones who know all the answers: strict, well-organized, neat. They should always behave with decorum, shouldn't engage in controversy, and should always obey their principal.

44 Others see teachers differently—as raisers of questions, informal leaders, encouragers of children's queries, experiments and decisions.

Today teachers are expected to function as self-respecting professionals—to be aware of current developments in curriculum reform and learning research, to participate in community decisions about the schools and to provide leadership for those functioning on an internship level.

What does leadership on the part of a teacher mean? It means being an authority without being authoritarian.

Only when teachers can bring themselves to accept the dual role of leader and sharer can they effectively teach their assistants. The challenge is to find ways to explain without pushing, to suggest without demanding, to guide without carping. They can teach those fundamentals necessary for the development of the curriculum they have in mind—and also receive from the paraprofessionals those ideas that seem to fit this curriculum. Most significant, when they teach facts and concepts to children, they will, through their own behavior, model *how* to teach.

Aides, too, have role expectations of teachers, born out of their own experiences as children in school and as parents of children in school. For example, aides often expect teachers to behave in an authoritarian manner—giving orders, never asking advice, making unilateral decisions, rarely showing doubt. People react in different ways to this expectation. Some become submissive, others bossy. Some aides may not show much initiative because they will not consider it their job to initiate. Others may come on too strong, appearing as if they want to take over the classroom. But the teachers' awareness of such possibilities can shape their judgment of the aides' actual performance and needs. Then they can encourage their aides to function more appropriately as helping teachers.

This definitive clarification of teacher/aide roles is crucial for only one reason—the children. This is the central issue: do your actions and your decisions in the classroom meet the needs of the children?

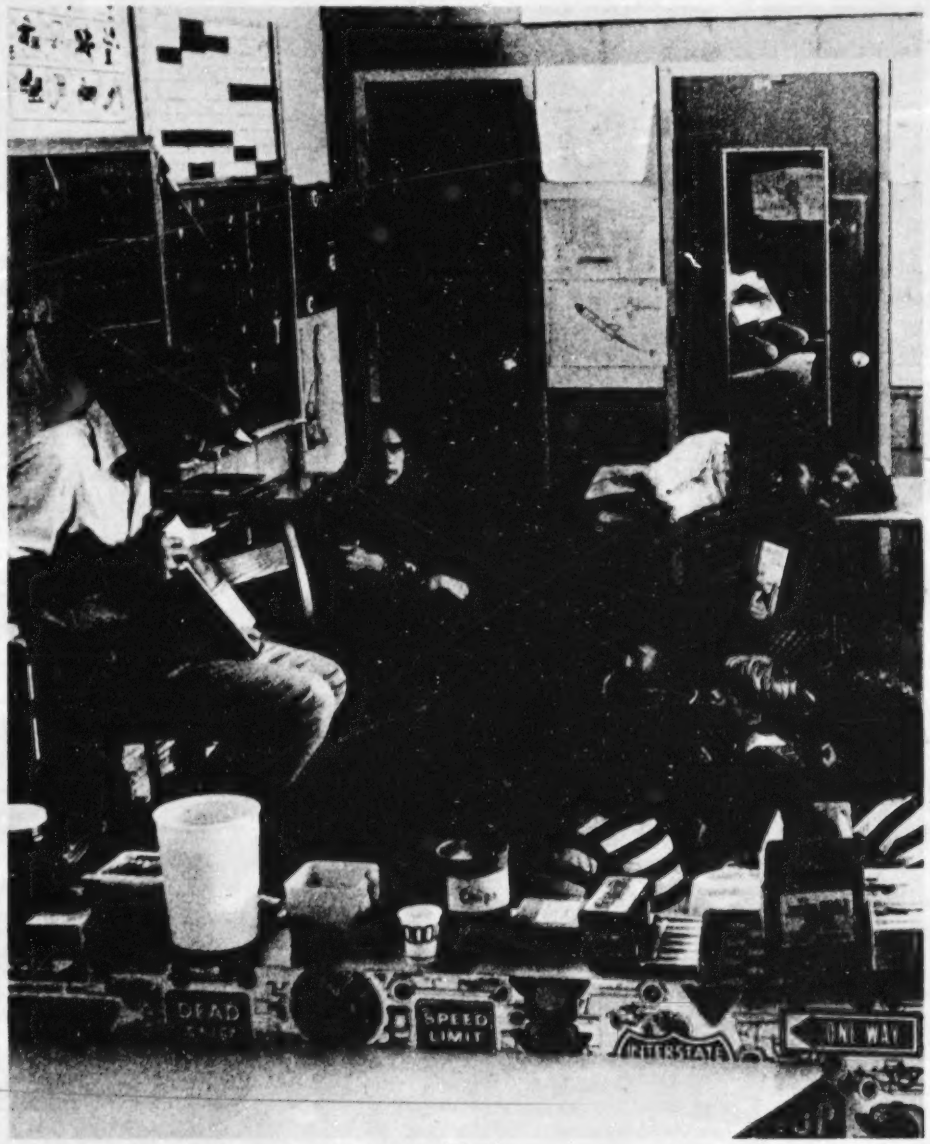
RESPONSIBILITIES

Here are some practical ideas to ensure that your actions and decisions do indeed serve the children.

- Have regular planned time to talk together about the children. (Not sure what to talk about? Try these: How can we help this child begin to like books? How can we teach another to respect the rights of others? How can we help a third learn beginning word sounds? How can we teach the concept of three? How can we help the children learn to take turns?)
- Observe and record children's behavior and discuss it together. (There are useful guides to taking records that you can study together.)
- Share the *real* teaching. Aides, like teachers, can read stories, prepare materials, teach small reading and math groups, check homework, take attendance, supervise projects, sing songs and so on.
- Find out if your aides have specialties. Can they play the guitar? Sew? Knit? Are they good at cooking? Crossword puzzles? Weaving? Woodworking? They can teach any of these skills to children.
- Share lesson plans, interesting articles, curriculum guides, books and magazines with your aides.

- Make teaching materials and games for the children together. It will cement your relationship as well as enrich the classroom.
- Stress the confidentiality of the information you share with each other about the children. (If the aides live in the school community and the teachers do not, the aides may have important information bearing on the children's lives and school work—sharing, however, is for professional purposes, not gossip.)

A final word—when the team is functioning well, when you keep your focus on the children, when you retain your sense of humor, then the experience of working together can be genuinely satisfying for both, and a model of cooperation for the children.



46 Parents and Schools

Vito Perrone

To take a stand: schools desiring the fullest possible growth—personal and intellectual—of children *must* actively encourage parent participation. They must accept parents as valuable teachers, nurture increased levels of teacher-parent interaction, and support the legitimate rights of parents to be involved in school decisions that affect their children.

Large numbers of schools and teachers claim to support such a value orientation. Yet, we find only a relatively few successful parent participation/partnership programs. Why? Two significant barriers may be the high degree of professionalization and of curriculum specialization characteristic of so many contemporary schools. The enormous time and energy commitments that are demanded—of teachers as well as parents—also contribute. And, to be sure, sometimes there is a history of school-community hostility.

Helping teachers to move beyond these inhibiting factors and become more comfortable in actually implementing closer ties to parents is a major purpose of this article. Since parent participation takes on its greatest meaning for the child, teacher and parent at the classroom-level, I will focus most of my attention there rather than on the school as a whole.

An Overview

First, let me suggest some activities that parents can handle adequately in the elementary classroom. The list is not intended to be all inclusive. (And the reader should note that it does not include clerical tasks. Clerical tasks, from my point of view, ought not to be assigned to a parent volunteer. Involvement with children's learning brings commitment; running off stencils in a back room or correcting papers does not.)

- Reading to children
- Listening to children read
- Assisting children in such activities as sewing, cooking, knitting, auto mechanics, woodworking, art, music, dance, etc.
- Presenting slides and films of trips to interesting places
- Taking small groups of children on field trips associated with the children's interests
- Assuming responsibility for interest and activity centers
- Sharing interests, hobbies and unique cultural backgrounds with children
- Preparing instructional materials
- Assisting children in the use of audiovisual devices
- Assisting teachers in program evaluation

Such activities bring children into contact with adults, other than the teacher, who can share a potentially broad range of interests, occupations, and life styles. Not only can this result in an enriching experience for children (how many adults, other than their parents and teachers, do most children talk to in depth?) but it may also help provide needed individualization. Another outcome is an enlarged opportunity for parents to relate the

home life to school and the school more directly to home, thus strengthening the parents' sense of involvement with the education of their children. And, of course, it has the potential of helping teachers gain added perspective from parents about the larger community in which the school exists.

In addition, such parent participation has the potential of increasing public understanding of education. Teachers and school administrators often argue that positive change is impossible in their schools because "parents won't support change." Our experience at the University of North Dakota's Center for Teaching and Learning might be instructive. We have, for the past eight years, been actively involved in helping teachers and schools move toward more open learning environments. And classrooms, in many settings, have undergone enormous change. Yet parents have tended to be very supportive—in large measure because teachers actively sought to involve them (not "sell" them). The more time parents have spent in the classrooms, interacting with children and discussing education with teachers, the more supportive they have been.[1] (Parents, like teachers, need a vision of a school that can be different from that which they experienced in order to react thoughtfully.)

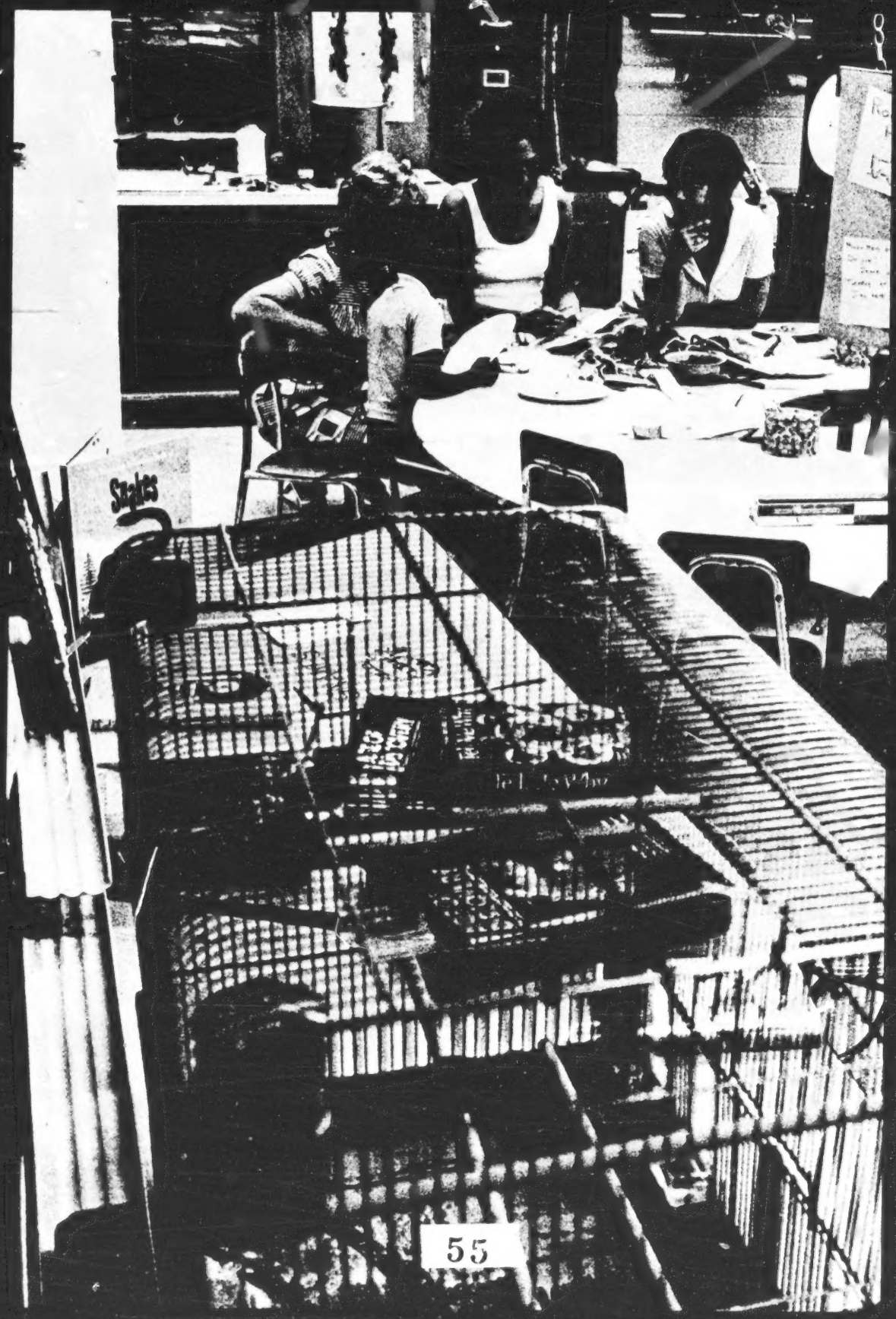
Some Ways To Begin

Teachers need to communicate, as early as possible, their desire to have parents participate in the life of the classroom. Sending a formal note to parents inviting them to "visit some time," is not the way. (Have you ever received that kind of invitation? How seriously did *you* take it?) *Organizing* for active participation and making parents feel they *can* contribute is essential. Teachers need to make personal contacts with parents. Informal coffees, home visits, telephone conversations have all been useful in establishing an early rapport. In such informal settings, a teacher can begin to share some of his/her hopes for the children and gain a corresponding perspective from parents. Discussions about such matters as classroom organization, materials, evaluation processes and ways for parents to participate can be addressed by the teacher. Parents, in turn, can be encouraged to relate personal interests that might be useful to the teachers and helpful to the children. Relationships formed in these informal contacts will help both the teacher and the parents focus on assisting the children.

In the early meetings, a checklist can be given to parents with positive suggestions of classroom activities in which they might participate; it can become the base for a resource-file. Using the file, the teacher can begin to organize parents to participate in classroom-related activities. Or a parent committee can be asked to assume responsibility for organizing volunteers.

It is usually a major step for a parent to volunteer to assist in a classroom. One way teachers can assure that the early experiences for a parent are successful is by keeping them quite specific. Many parents will feel more comfortable knowing that they are coming to the classroom at 10:00 a.m. *this* Tuesday and Thursday to teach knitting to five children for a half-hour; or that they will assist a small group of children in preparing pancakes at 9:00 a.m. on Friday; or read stories to children at 11:00 a.m. Monday and Wednesday; or take four children to the supermarket at 11:00 a.m. on Thursday, etc. This approach of assigning classroom activities may well be the pattern for most of the parents throughout the year. Others, however, may feel comfortable enough to come at a specific time each week—each Tuesday afternoon—to assist in whatever manner seems appropriate at that time.

[1] Michael Patton, *Structural Dimensions of Open Education and Parental Reactions to Open Classrooms in North Dakota: A Sociological View of the Diffusion of Open Education as an Innovation in Organization Structure and Processes*. Un-published Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Wisconsin, Madison, Wisconsin, 1973.


Staples

Let me relate more of our experience in North Dakota. We have found that parent participation increases in classrooms that are moving in more open directions, becoming more decentralized. Parents can enter such settings easily. In highly structured classrooms, where most teaching is carried on in a whole-group manner, the entry of a parent may be "disruptive" (everything tends to stop and everyone looks). We have found also that when parents are encouraged to devote time to highly structured classroom settings, specialized training is demanded, thus reducing the number who can participate.

Before proceeding, I should add a caution. Teachers need to avoid making negative judgments about those parents who do not participate in the classroom; such as, "They aren't interested in their children's classroom experience." In many communities, single-parent families are common and the parent works. There may be preschool children at home, transportation may not be available, the parents' language might be other than English, etc. All of the foregoing might make participation in the classroom setting difficult, if not impossible. Teachers and the schools where they work should consider ways of supporting parents who may have special problems with participation. Babysitting services might be provided for preschool children of parents assisting in classrooms. Carpools can be established to provide transportation between the home and the school. Written communications can be in the language of parents (Spanish, for example). Ways can be found for parents to engage in activities at home that are useful to the classroom, i.e., developing activity cards, making games for reading and social studies, saving scrap items useful in arts and crafts, etc. Or a few children can be permitted to go to a particular parent's home for a learning activity—for example, bookbinding, conversational Spanish or the preparation of an ethnic dish.

Maintaining Communication

To sustain an active parent participation program, teachers must work at ways of maintaining communication. I commented earlier about *informal coffees*. Such activities can be organized at least several times each year. Indeed, some schools invite a small group of parents each week to have coffee with the teacher. Administrators may act as facilitators by assisting with the classroom at that particular time or arranging to do so with a special teacher—music, physical education, etc. (Substitutes might also be used.) In other settings, some parents are invited each Friday afternoon for "tea and cookies"; the children assist in hosting the activity. Informal meetings may also occur in parents' homes on a rotating basis.

A classroom newsletter is another helpful way to keep parents informed. It can take on many forms. Many teachers that we work with send home a newsletter with the children every day, thereby providing children an excellent opportunity at the end of each day to evaluate what they have been about. Newsletters also serve to keep parents sufficiently informed so that they can carry on a meaningful discussion with their children as well as the teachers.

Parent-teacher conferences, which schools tend to schedule several times a year, can also be a means for maintaining effective communication and building a partnership (if not over-formalized). If possible, the conference should be for not less than a half-hour in duration, although this might necessitate scheduling a class conference over a two- or three-week period, the results can be more satisfactory than under the typical pattern of jamming them all into one or two days. A meaningful discussion cannot occur in a ten-minute conference. As many parents have told me—and as I have also felt—"I always know that someone is waiting to come in so I'd better hurry."

50 Teachers should make the conference setting as comfortable as possible—again a sign that the school is friendly and open to the parent. If the conference must be carried out in the classroom, better to move away from the teacher's desk. The reading corner might be a pleasant place. (And there ought to be chairs adults can sit in comfortably.) It is also helpful for teachers to be sensitive to *their* language. Professional jargon often gets in the way of effective communication with parents. And teachers need to be good listeners at conferences. Parents can provide teachers with many useful insights related to their children.

Parent-teacher workshops are also useful. I have participated in large numbers of active workshops, which have focused on such areas as reading, mathematics, science, human relations. Not only did parents gain more knowledge about education and educational materials (making attribute-blocks, for example, is a good way to gain a sense of what they are and how they are used) but they produced, along with the teachers, fresh materials for the classroom. Parents have occasionally discovered, in such settings, that many teachers, like themselves, "struggle" with materials and their use. And parents sometimes find that they are more able in some areas than many of the teachers, thus helping to reduce the gap that often exists between themselves and teachers. I believe this "leveling" is helpful, making parents less anxious about participation because they can feel more confident that their contribution will be respected.

Some schools (typically those with relatively mature parent programs) have established *parent-centers*—containing books, periodicals, films, and ideas for classroom activities to assist parents in continuing their learning and enlarging their capacity for active participation. As elementary school enrollment declines, space for such parent-centers may be easier to justify.

Granted, all of the foregoing can take much time. Additional planning is necessary. Occasionally the schedule needs to be altered to accommodate the times that parents can be there. And the increased openness does provide *some* parents enlarged opportunities for criticism of teachers and the school. But parent-participation is so critical that no problems or risks ought to stand in the way.

We have made little mention of the principal to this point. But, clearly, his/her support can make a critical difference. Principals can assist teachers in maintaining effective communication with parents and can ensure a quality of openness of the school to parents. Effective leadership for parent participation should be one of the principal's major tasks.

Participant Councils

Implicit to much of what has been outlined above is a range of informal decision-making processes that relate to particular classrooms. But much may depend on individual teachers and a particularly supportive principal. What happens if they leave? How can parents be assured that similarly motivated professional staff will be appointed? In some communities—too few—participant councils are being organized in association with each school (or segments of a school; for example, the ungraded primary unit) consisting of constituent parents and teachers.[2] These councils interpret the school to the community,

[2] The PTA is beginning to take a more aggressive position on decision-making in relation to a particular school and may well become the base for organizing participant councils. Contact the National Congress of Parents and Teachers, 700 N. Rush St., Chicago, IL 60611, for helpful resources. Afram Associates, Inc. (68 East 131st St. New York, NY 11415) is committed to supporting parent decision-making in education; it also has a wealth of material for parents; write for bibliography. Other helpful sources are the Institute for Responsive Education (Dr. Don Davies, Director), Boston University, Commonwealth Ave., Boston, MA 02215; and the National Committee for Citizens in Education, Suite 410, Wilde Lake Village, Columbia, MD 21044.

represent it in its relations with the Board of Education, and keep the principal and staff informed of community needs and concerns. Such councils also help organize parents and others in the community who wish to contribute to the life of the schools. Many councils interview prospective teachers and take part in school-wide evaluations. Such councils are in evolutionary stages and the full range of their responsibilities is not yet clear. But they do represent another major effort to secure a meaningful parent role.

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Barbara H. Goodwin
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